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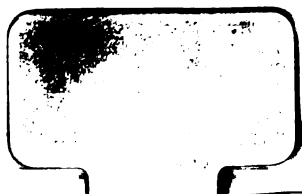
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STORIES FOR OUR GIRLS.

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STORIES FOR OUR GIRLS.

CONTENTS.

I.

AUNT MARGARET'S STORY.

By M. E. TOWNSEND, Author of 'Rachel's Resolution,'
&c., &c.

II.

KITTY'S TRAINING. By C. M. KING.

III.

FERNSEED ; OR, THE WOODLAND FAIRY.

By BLANCHE PECHELL.

IV.

PINK RIBBONS.

By MRS. JEROME MERCIER, Author of 'Kennerby
Village,' &c., &c.

V.

A FAITHFUL SERVANT. By M. E. TOWNSEND.

VI.

THE STORY OF A CAT. Written by Herself.

VII.

THE THREE COTTAGES.

By A. M. GOODRICH, Author of 'Hester Blake,' &c.

VIII.

A DAUGHTER'S DUTY. By MRS. A. PHILLIMORE.

IX.

LISO'S STEPMOTHER.

By the Author of 'Mademoiselle Mori,' 'Sydonie's Dowry,' &c., &c.



AUNT MARGARET'S STORY.

By M. E. TOWNSEND.

'A good heart's worth gold.'—*Shakespeare.*

IT was a bright afternoon in early spring; not a languid 'growing' afternoon, but clear and fresh. The earth, newly turned up in ridge and furrow, smelt good; the young leaf-buds and the delicate blades of grass were putting out their tender green—everything seemed to laugh in the sunshine.

Aunt Margaret's cottage stood rather away from the village of Langley, on rising ground which had once been part of a wide, wild common, now cultivated after a fashion, and studded here and there with little cottages—some tidy enough, some not much better than hovels. From her casement window she could see ever so far into the blue distance; sometimes, when it was very clear, she could even see the masts of the ships in the harbour, for Langley was only seven miles from the sea. She got every bit of sun that anybody could get at one window in the course of the day, and she would not have changed her home for a palace. To-day, she is sitting as usual in her favourite place

by the window; she leans back in her chair and the knitting-needles fly in her busy hands. Poor Aunt Margaret! she cannot move about like other people; she has a spine complaint, and to creep from one room to the other is about as much as she can do. But the neighbours are very kind to her, and she has a little annuity, besides what she makes by her knitting. Her cheerful face and smile are always ready for those who seek her, and she has helped many a one over the rough places in their lives. She is not as old as she looks: you can see that she has had much pain to bear, yes, and sorrow, too; but there are traces of beauty left in the pale, worn face, and as you look at her you cannot help feeling that she must have had a story in her life. As she sits there, knitting, the sound of a voice, just outside the cottage, reaches her ear. It is a girl's voice, clear and ringing, and rather defiant:—

‘You may do as you like, I’m sure, Joe. It’s all the same to me!’ That was what the voice said.

An expression of pain flitted across the invalid’s face as she caught the words; but the next moment a pair of laughing eyes were looking at her from her own door, and she was obliged to smile in spite of herself.

‘Why, Susan, what brings you here so early?’ she said, as the girl to whom the laughing eyes

belonged came in, and, closing the door, seated herself on a low stool by her side.

'To see you, Aunt Maggie,' replied Susan. 'I thought you might be dull and want me.'

'I'm always glad to see you, my child,' said the elder woman; 'but did not mother want you, too?'

'Oh, no,' answered Susan. And Aunt Margaret said no more, for she knew that her young friend was 'a girl of her word.'

There is no denying that Susan Stokes was very pretty; and, as she sat there next to poor faded Margaret, she looked the picture of health and fresh bright youth. There was such a roguish look about her blue eyes, such a droll dimple in her cheek, the hair that shaded her forehead was such a pretty colour—brown, with a bit of sunshine in it, as it were—that, altogether, you couldn't help looking at her. And yet—wasn't there just a little pucker in her forehead and a turn about the corners of her mouth, as if (not so very long ago, either) she had been in something very like 'a temper'?

Susan was no more Aunt Margaret's niece than yours or mine; but somehow the girl, like many another, had wound herself round the invalid's heart, which was a very soft one for girls—and boys, too, for that matter, and so she had got to call her Aunt Margaret, or Aunt Maggie, as a sort of pet name.

Susan was very silent for a long time, unusually

silent for her; but all at once she looked up in her friend's face and said, 'Aunt Maggie, did you ever have a sweetheart?'

A faint smile played round Aunt Margaret's mouth at this question, and then the expression of pain that we saw before came back again, but she answered quietly, 'Surely, Susie, you know I was not always what I am now. When I was your age folks used to say I was not so bad-looking either.' And she laughed a sad little laugh, and looked kindly into the girl's inquiring face. She knew perfectly well in her own mind why Susan had asked her this question, for had she not seen Joe Ashton's figure disappearing down the road that led to the village, just after Susan's entry into the cottage? She knew as well as if any one had told her that Joe had walked with Susan to the door and then made himself scarce lest Aunt Margaret should see him: which he need not have done, either; for Joe was a great favourite of hers, and glad enough she was that he had set his warm, manly heart on her saucy little friend.

'I wonder,' continued Aunt Margaret, thoughtfully speaking, as if half to herself; 'I wonder if you girls ever think of the meaning of that word,—or rather, its two words—*sweet heart*? It's come to be spoken of in a silly sort of way now, but it has a right good meaning of its own. The real worth of a person, you see, is the heart inside;

what the outside is don't matter much either way, as long as the heart is sound and sweet to the core; and just as if you broke the shell of a nut and found it all rotten and bad within, you'd cast it from you, so it should be if you found the heart you loved was worthless or untrue: but if *that's* good, you can't make too much of it.'

Susan looked thoughtful. Then she said coaxingly, 'Aunt Maggie, won't you tell me your story?'

'It's not much to be called a story, Susan, except it may be for sadness,' said Aunt Maggie, with a sigh; 'but such as it is you shall hear it, though it's long since I've spoken of it to any one:—

'There was never a better-looking lad, I should think, than Ernest Martin, when I was about eighteen—just your age, Susan—and he was five-and-twenty. 'There was seven years' difference between us; but I was an only child, and didn't mind people a little older than myself. Ernest was an orphan; he had lived at Langley as long as I could remember, but his parents did not belong to the place, they died when Ernest was a child, and he had been sent to live with his grandfather, who was the village carpenter at that time. There was always something remarkable about Ernest's countenance. I can mind now, though I didn't think much of it then, how I used to watch him as he sat opposite me in church when I was quite a child

and he was getting a big lad. When it was hot, and the service long, he would go to sleep for a while, and then there would come a sort of look about his face, all quiet and peaceful-like,—I don't know how it was, but it made one think of an angel. Then as he grew up he was so big and strong and broad-shouldered, and yet his face so fair and white, with a lot of bright, thick hair tossed about it. There was something so manly and yet so gentle about him and all his ways—strong and tender were just the words for him; and yet, with all his gentleness, he had a determined character too. I used to tell him, sometimes, there was like a vein of iron running through it. He had one fault, if you can call it so. He was too easily wounded, and would brood over things, and torment himself about them long after others would have forgotten them. But everybody loved him. Children and animals, and all helpless things, took to him at once. Why he cared for me I don't know, but he always did, from a boy, and when I was eighteen he asked me to be his wife. You may judge if I was proud of him in my secret heart, but I didn't show it much. I was foolish in those days, and eaten up with vanity and conceit. Indeed, I've often wondered since how Ernest ever had patience with me at all, such a flighty thing as I was. I used to tease him sometimes out of his very life, only to see how he'd look; and that was all very well at

first, for he knew I didn't mean it. But by degrees it became more serious. I was so sure of his love for me that I thought it didn't matter how I trifled with it, though indeed I loved him dearly all the time. Then other people got round me and made me more silly than ever. I had early lost my mother, and my father had spoilt me all my life.

'There was a girl then living in Langley, Sally Bates was her name; she left the place when she married and I have never heard of her since. She was just as flighty as I was, only she had a worse heart, I think. She didn't seem to care for anybody much but herself, and if she saw things going right with people, she liked to try and put them wrong, and get them into trouble. Sally had a brother, too, a weak, vain sort of young man, who thought himself a very fine gentleman with his smart pin and watch-chain. He kept a little shop in the village, or tried to keep it, rather, for he didn't make it answer very well; he hadn't energy and industry enough for that. Well, as soon as he saw that Ernest and I were "keeping company" he began to make up to me, Sally edging him on; for I think, though she never said so, that she had a liking for Ernest herself. Of course I knew that Tom Bates was not fit to hold a candle to my Ernest, but, foolish girl that I was, I liked his compliments and his pretty speeches—and so at last Ernest and I came to words about it. He

was very quiet and gentle with me, but very much in earnest—I used always to tell him he was so like his name. He tried to show me how wrong it was to go on as I did, and what a bad companion Sarah was for me; and then he said, if his wife had such friends he should be obliged to shut the door against them.

‘I answered him half in fun and half in scorn, and when he found he could make nothing of me, he went away.

‘Soon after that, the whole village was astir about a great fair and show of horsemanship that were to be held at S——. Nothing else was thought of, and stories of all the wonders to be seen flew about like wild-fire. Sally came to me at once, and persuaded me—though I did refuse at first—to make a party with her and her brother to go down to the fair. Tom would drive, she said, and it would be “a lark,” such as we had never had before. Well, it was all settled, and I had given my word to join them, when Ernest heard of it; and oh, Susan, I never shall forget his face when he came to try and prevent my going! He told me again how he could not bear to see me about with Tom and Sally, and how he would have proposed to take me himself, only that he had a very heavy spell of work on just then—(I ought to have told you, that when his old grandfather died he had succeeded to the business); but if I would give up the other party he

would try and manage it even now. His pleading look and his entreaties would have melted any heart but mine; but I was bent on the trip, half ashamed to disappoint Sally, because I knew she would jeer at me, and determined to hold my own with Ernest, lest, as my evil companions had suggested, he should "come over me" too much, and never let me have my own way. At last he said, in a kind of despair, "Maggie, we shall never get on like this. I should never be able to do with a giddy wife, you know." "You may do as you like as to that Ernest, I'm sure," said I: "it's all the same to me!"

Susan started involuntarily as she heard the words; but Margaret went on in the same tone as before, only the two pink spots on her cheeks burned brighter than ever as she came to this part of her narrative.

"Do you mean it, Maggie?" said Ernest; and his voice sounded hoarse and altered. "I mean what I say most times, Ernest," I answered. "Then, Maggie, is everything at an end between us?" "If you like," said I.

'What evil spirit prompted the words I don't know, for I certainly did not mean them in my heart; but I was tired and cross, and just then, at the other end of the field, I saw my father coming home from work, for we had been standing just outside this cottage; and I turned indoors sullenly

enough, and Ernest went home without another word.

'The next evening I was coming back from Sally's rather in a hurry; for we had been talking about the fair, which was the next day, and I thought I should be late for father's tea. As I came up the lane I saw Ernest working in the field on the left-hand side above the road. He was always fond of digging; he said it rested him after his work in the shop. This evening his face looked whiter than ever: his mouth was set, and there were dark lines about his eyes. He raised himself wearily, and, leaning on his spade, watched me coming up the path. Never, as long as I live, shall I forget his tall figure standing up against the evening sky, his eyes glowing, and his sad, wistful look as I passed—yes, Susan, passed him without a word or a glance! When I had got on a little way I turned my head; and there he was in the same attitude, as if rooted to the spot, gazing, gazing at me still. Then suddenly all the real, deep love I had for him came surging up in my heart. A great yearning seized me. Should I go back? I longed—oh, how I longed!—to tell him that I loved him—loved him better than any one else in the world—and that I would do all he wished. But still my wicked pride held me back, and father was waiting for his tea, and—I thought another day would do. Ah, I did not know then that to-morrow would be too late!

'Well, I spent a miserable night, and a miserable day at the fair. Wherever I went Ernest's white, despairing countenance, haunted me like a ghost. What really happened as we drove home I never knew. I believe Tom Bates had had a drop too much, and could not rightly guide the horse, which was young and skittish: anyway, we were upset. Tom and his sister both escaped without injury; but I knew nothing till I woke one day in the room adjoining this, feeling as if half my senses were gone, and my back nearly broken. One of the neighbours was watching by my bedside; and when I opened my eyes she gave me some cooling drink, told me to keep quiet and not attempt to talk, and left the room.

'For a little while I lay quite still—half dozing, I think; but presently—the door being ajar, and my ears sharpened perhaps by illness—I began to catch bits of a conversation going on in the next room—this very room it was. "Shall you tell her?" said one voice. "Not I," answered the other. "Well, there's the letter," said the first speaker. "Why, Martha, you must be crazy!" And here I clearly recognized the voice of the good woman who had just been with me. "She's as weak as a babby; and 'twould just kill her outright." When I heard that, my heart seemed to stand still: the most horrible dread took possession of me; and, calling the woman, I insisted on being told every-

thing. She, scared beyond measure at the mischief she had done, had not the wit to parry my questions ; and soon the sad and bitter truth was before me.

‘ Ernest had left the village on the day of the fair, and had not since been heard of. He had left a letter for me, and one for his friend and partner, Will Somers, asking him to take his business for him until he should return, though he did not know when that would be. He had started for Liverpool, intending from thence to sail for America ; and he would write again when he got there. My letter said the same, and other things that I could never tell any one : I had driven him to desperation—and this was the end of it——’

‘ But, Aunt Maggie,’ interrupted Susan, hotly, ‘ it was a cruel shame ! He should have waited, and not been in such a hurry.’

‘ Ah, child, so you think now ! and many said the same, and blamed him for it. That was the hardest part of it all, Susan, when I had to fight his battles, as it were, against myself. But I could never blame him. I was too much to blame myself. When I said those cruel words, he quite thought I had given him up for good and all. I heard afterwards that Sally had gone about telling every one I meant to give up Ernest, and take to Tom ; and she took care Ernest should hear it, too. But I don’t think it was so much jealousy that moved him, as the

thought that he had lost my love. That maddened him, and in a moment of despair he started off. It was rash and hasty, I'll allow ; but, Susan, many a man has done the same, or worse, goaded by a woman's folly.

' Week after week I hovered between life and death ; month after month, as I slowly crept back to life again, I watched and waited for the promised letter ; but none ever came. Every inquiry was made ; and they say the ship in which he sailed must have been lost. I don't know how that may be ; but I'm sure he would have kept his word about writing if he could. I know it was God's will to take the blessing from me because I did not value it. It was all my fault, Susan—no one's fault but mine. But sorrow and loneliness have taught me much ; God sent them to tame my stubborn heart before it was too late, and I do not murmur now. Some day I shall see my Ernest again, and tell him all—tell him how I loved him, and have loved him all my life. Sometimes as I've sat here, thinking, and watching, and waiting (especially after my dear old father's death), it has seemed almost more than I could bear ; not the trouble for myself, I don't mean ; but because I could do nothing for Ernest—not even the smallest little thing—to show my sorrow and my love, though my heart was almost like to burst.

' Ah, Susan, if you ever have a true heart offered

you, don't trifle with it ! It's a rare possession, the love of a good man. Take it as God's gift, and cherish it all your life through.'

Susan was crying quietly now, and Aunt Margaret leant back faint and exhausted with the exertion of speaking. One of the neighbours came in to get her tea for her ; and Susan, with a silent squeeze of the hand, slipped away and went home.

Her mother said she 'couldn't think what had come to the girl all the evening, she was *that* quiet.' But Susan was pondering in her own mind the story of Aunt Margaret's life. She knew very well that she (Susan) had had a quarrel with Joe about certain giddy companions of her own, who did her evil and not good, and of whom he did not approve ; and she began to think there might be some sense in what he said.

Another spring has come round again. A snug little cottage, not very far from Aunt Margaret's, has been furnished by Joe Ashton, and to it he has brought his bride—the merry, laughing Susan.

Bright as she is, and, as some might think, thoughtless, she has never forgotten Aunt Margaret's story ; she is never defiant now, or self-willed, or tiresome in her temper, as she used to be : at least, that is what Joe says, and I suppose he ought to know best.

KITTY'S TRAINING.

By C. M. KING.

CHAPTER I.

'The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask.'

'It's all very fine to talk about bearing people's burdens, but I should like to know who'll bear mine? Why, nobody knows what they are; and what's more, nobody *cares* to know; so I'm sure nobody'll bear them for me.' As she made this uncomfortable remark in rather an undertone, and a somewhat impatient one, a young girl flung down the book she was reading, and took up some needle-work from a table near her. Two large tears fell upon the white cambric as she unfolded it, but evidently she had no intention of giving way to her feelings, for she passed her hand quickly across her eyes, and began to work, humming meanwhile some snatches of 'Cheer boys, cheer.'

All this was observed by an elderly man, who was lying on a couch in the corner of the room. There was a look about his face that at once told you something of his history. Lines of suffering about

the mouth, combined with the sunken cheeks and the dim light in the eyes, revealed the fact of a long and severe illness. In spite of this, Edward Longley was ready to take part in all that was going on around him; and as he watched his grandchild, first at her reading and then at her work, he felt sure that some cloud had flitted across her sky, which was usually clear and bright.

'What's the matter, Kitty?' he said, in a cheerful tone. 'What's disturbing you?' 'Oh, nothing, grandfather,' was the answer. But this did not satisfy the kind heart of the old man, who, in the long, weary days and nights of his illness, had learnt to feel very tenderly for the distresses of others. '*Nothing*, means *something*, Kitty,' he said; 'and if you're in trouble, my child, and I can help you, you've only just to tell me all about it, and we'll see what can be done.' 'Thank you, grandfather,' replied Kitty; 'but really I'm in no particular trouble: it's only that book Miss Craven lent me yesterday when I went up to the Hall. I dare say it's very good, but it made me feel rather unhappy. I thought it was a story when I took it, but it isn't—only here and there—so it's rather dull, and I shall ask Miss Craven if I may change it for some other book.'

Just at that moment a neighbour came in to inquire for Longley, and to ask if she could bring them anything from the town, about two miles

distant from Ashted, and so the subject of the book and of Kitty's sadness dropped for the present.

But that very evening after tea Kitty was sitting working close to her grandfather ; she thought he was asleep, for his eyes were shut, and she was not a little astonished when he said, without opening them, ' Kitty, what was that book about, that Miss Craven lent you ? Perhaps by-and-by you'd read some of it to me.' ' Indeed, grandfather,' replied Kitty, ' I don't think you'd care for it. It really did make me feel quite downhearted, though I told you there was nothing the matter. No more there was : only that book tried to make out that trouble was not so bad a thing as people generally thought, for it gave others the opportunity of doing good, and that it was very often our own fault if we got no help from others in our troubles. It set me thinking, and I don't see that if I ever get into trouble I shall have much help from others, and yet I don't know that it's my fault : that's all, grandfather.' ' Let me see the book,' said Longley, and Kitty went over to the table and fetched it. The old man put on his spectacles, and was for some time quite silent, while he looked over page after page, and at last he said, ' Kitty, I think if you had read this book with a different idea in your mind, it would have made you very happy, instead of sad. " Bear ye one another's burdens " is the motto of the whole, and if you had only been thinking of the troubles

of others, and how you could help to bear them, instead of looking forward to your own, which perhaps may never come, you would have learnt many a useful lesson as you read.' 'I help others!' said Kitty. 'I bear their burdens! I don't see, grandfather, that I can do much of that sort of thing. I'm too young, and too poor, and am kept pretty well at work, without any time to see after other people.'

'Do you know what bearing people's burdens means, Kitty? It isn't that you should always take the trouble quite away from the person who has it—that belongs to God, and very often to God alone—but we can all help each other in some way, and do many a thing, however small, to make people's burdens lighter; and we can say a kind word, and, more than all, we can pray. Why, you're bearing one burden now, in staying here and nursing me. I used to think this illness of mine was a very heavy burden, I can tell you, when I was first laid down; and after your grandmother died, if no one could have come to be with me, what should I have done, sick and helpless as I still am? But you've been a help and comfort to me all this time. Depend upon it, Kitty, if you are only on the look-out for opportunities of bearing the burdens of others, you'll find plenty, and it's the best way to make your own lighter, whatever they may be; though I hope you've not got many, my child?' Kitty made no answer

She had, or thought she had, more troubles than her grandfather knew of; but it was so pleasant to hear him say that she was a help to him, that she seemed to forget them all. She was very fond of him, and it was a real service of love that she rendered to him. Happily for her and for himself, his illness had not made him irritable, for day by day God had been teaching him that difficult lesson of Patience—so hard to learn, so blessed when learnt,—and she never had to complain that there was no pleasing him, or that she couldn't do things right anyhow. Later on in the evening, when she wished him good-night, it was with a feeling of great gladness that she said, 'After all, grandfather, I shan't change that book. You've made me want to read it all now.'

When she went to her little room the moonlight was streaming in at the open window. It was a glorious summer night; the shadow of the trees lay deep and long upon the grass, wet with heavy dew. A beautiful myrtle climbed up the side of the house, and had almost reached the top. In the bright moonlight Kitty could see the little knobs, so like ivory, with the pink stain on each, that after a few more days of sun and heat would open from buds into flowers, and then what a sheet of snowy blossom there would be! As she looked out she thought it was the loveliest night she had ever seen, and her heart was full of joy. Her

grandfather's words had changed everything. A weight seemed lifted off, and as she knelt down she added to her usual prayers a petition that henceforth she might be enabled to minister more and more to the wants of others, and, in however small a way, to help those that needed help. Truly, on that day, without doing any very great or noble deed, the old man and the young girl had 'borne one another's burdens !'

You will like to hear something of the place where Kitty was living, so I must begin by saying that Ashted Hall had belonged to the Craven family for more than three hundred years. The present owner had come into possession soon after he was of age, about thirty years before the time we are speaking of, and all his children had been born there. They were very fond of the old place, which had always been to them a happy home.

The village of Ashted, a very small one, also belonged to Mr. Craven; the house, which stood high, looked down upon it with its beautiful church, and many a pretty peep of tower and spire could be had from the windows. But Longley's cottage did not stand in the village; it was quite on the other side of the property, in the direction of the woods which rose behind the house, and not very far from the farm. From his boyhood he had been in the service of the Cravens, as his father had been before

him, and he was appointed bailiff soon after the present owner came to live at Ashted.

The bailiff's cottage was indeed a nice home for any man, with an acre of ground belonging to it, giving ample room both for a flower and kitchen garden, and a little green lawn besides, which it was Longley's great ambition to keep in the very best order. 'Turf well kept,' he used to say, 'is one of the greatest ornaments to any place, and I like the master to see my little piece taken as much pains with as though 'twere inside of his own gates.' The wood behind the house was a favourite resort for Longley's three children, and at all seasons of the year they could find plenty of amusement there. They were grown up and married now. The daughter and one son were settled in distant counties, and it was seldom they were able to visit the old home. Kitty's father had married a girl in the neighbourhood, and had taken a farm about three miles off, on which he lived very comfortably. Of their three daughters, Kitty was the second. The eldest was in service, and Kitty had just engaged herself as housemaid to a lady in the neighbourhood, when she was wanted at Ashted, so the situation was given up. Margaret, the youngest, now fifteen, was the only one left with her mother, and there was no small amount of work put upon her young shoulders when she had to take the place of both her sisters.

CHAPTER II.

'A heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise.'

EARLY one morning orders had been given at Ashted that a large tree behind the bailiff's house should be cut down. Longley was at his post, watching the men at their work, when a large limb of the tree fell rather unexpectedly, and just where he was standing. Being unable to get out of the way in time, he was knocked down and crushed under it. Some minutes passed before they could get him from beneath the fallen branch, and as he had never uttered a sound, or even appeared to move, he was thought to be dead.

They had not far to carry him to his own cottage; and his poor wife, who was expecting him home to dinner, hearing more footsteps than usual, came to the door to see what was going on. The scene was a sad one, but when the doctor arrived she had the comfort of hearing that her husband was still alive. Under good treatment he soon showed signs of consciousness, but the injury was a very severe one, and no one could tell for some days what the consequences might be. He was lifted into his bed, from which he never moved for many weeks; and it was but too apparent that Longley's

last stroke of work had been done on that fatal morning. Poor man ! it was a bitter grief to him, and at first he found it very hard not to murmur : he was so fond of his work, and he had never known before what it was to be laid by for a day. Now it was not only the present suffering that he had to bear, but the prospect of a helpless old age. Happily for him, there was another side to the picture, and God taught him to look at this. Never had any man a more devoted wife to nurse him, or one more fitted by training and experience to undertake the work. Not a want was left unsupplied by their kind friends at the Hall, and almost every day would find one or other of the family at the cottage-door, with a basket of something that might do Longley good, or an offer to sit and read to him for a little time, 'while his wife must go for a walk in the village or the woods.'

What with doctoring, and nursing, and kindness, Longley certainly mended gradually ; but it was too evident that he would never regain the use of his limbs, and must be an invalid for life. A new bailiff must be appointed, and the Longleys expected to be removed from their happy home ; but this Mr. Craven would not hear of. 'No, no, Longley,' he said : 'in this cottage you have lived while you have been a good servant to me and looked after my interests, and in this cottage you shall end your days, if I live as long as you do.'

So they went on as before, and with the little they had saved and the pension allowed them by Mr. Craven, they were comfortable and happy.

But after a very few years, sorrow again visited the bailiff's home—the last sickness fell upon his wife. Kitty was sent for from the farm to nurse both grandfather and grandmother, and it was not very long before 'the one was taken and the other left.' Poor Kitty! She cried very bitterly at this her first sight of death. She closed her grandmother's eyes, and when the old man said, 'You will not leave me to die quite alone?' she thought she could never move from his side again.

Thus it came to pass that these two were all in all to each other, and the heart of the grandfather went out in more than common tenderness to this child, who was indeed the stay and comfort of his old age.

A few days after the conversation between Kitty and her grandfather about the book she had borrowed, they were sitting together in the afternoon, she working and he reading, when there was a knock at the door, and before Kitty had time to open it the handle was turned, and Mr. Arthur Craven, with his black retriever, Nora, had crossed the little passage and was standing beside them.

'Good afternoon, Longley,' he said; 'I have got a bit of news for you. I am come to say good bye.' 'Why, sir, what has happened?' answered Longley.

Only this : that I am off to-morrow to Portsmouth, o join my regiment, which is under orders for India, and we sail on Thursday. We did not expect it quite so soon ; but when a man has got a profession, he may just as well go into it at once, and there is no good in hanging about ; it makes good-byes all the worse when you are a long time saying them.' 'True, sir,' said Longley ; 'but to an old man like me, who is sure never to see your face again, it comes very sudden like. I hope there will be no fighting where you're going, Mr. Arthur ; I don't like those wars and rumours of wars.' 'No more do I like war, Longley ; but a soldier, you know, must be prepared to fight, or what's the use of him ? There has been fighting enough in India before now, God knows ; and if there is more to come, why, we must be ready for it, that's all. Perhaps I shall find you here when I come home again ; that is, if I ever do come home again,' the young man added, in a lower tone, as he shook hands with Longley. 'Good-bye, and mind that Kitty takes good care of you. You'll know when we start to-morrow, as my father goes with me to Portsmouth, and you'll hear the old horse trot down the lane.'

The tears were in the old man's eyes as he said, rather tremblingly, 'Good-bye, sir, and may God Almighty bless you !'

Arthur whistled to Nora, who was responding to

Kitty's caresses with all the affection of an old friend, and as he said good-bye to her at the door he added, 'It would be a kind thing; Kitty, if after we are gone to-morrow you would go up to the Hall and read something cheering to my blind sister for half-an-hour or so, for I am afraid she will fret; and my mother will have enough to do keeping them all up. Do you think you could go?' 'I am sure I could, sir,' said Kitty. 'Grandfather never wants me all the afternoon, and he would like me to go.' 'Thank you very much, then, and once more good-bye to you both.'

Longley looked very sorrowful, and when Kitty sat down beside him again she had hard work to cheer him up. She asked him why Mr. Arthur went to India, when they were all so fond of him, and he was an only son? 'Ah,' said Longley, 'it is because his heart is set upon it, and they don't like to oppose him. Perhaps they are right, but I know what a grief it is to them all. You see, since the death of the eldest son he has been their one thought and object; and when he took this soldiering plan into his head the master says to me one day, "Oh, Longley, now I shall have no son left to be the comfort of my old age, to carry on all I want to do at Ashted; but when a boy has set his whole heart on one profession, it is of no use thwarting him: it's like bending a bow the wrong way, no good will come of it, so we must let

him go." I did feel sorry for the master, and now he has got to go and see him off! God help him!' So Longley and Kitty talked a long while, and Kitty said to herself, 'There's a burden to be borne in that happy home; I wonder if I may do just a very little to help them to bear it?'

Next day she and her grandfather were sitting at dinner. All of a sudden they heard sounds of wheels, and the trot of the old horse, Prince, was a sound that could not be mistaken. Quickly went the dog-cart down the lane, on its way to the station. Kitty and her grandfather looked at each other, but neither of them spoke. No more dinner was eaten, and in silence Kitty got up and cleared the table; then she went and sat down at the other side of the room, hoping that the old man would get his usual dose. He closed his eyes, but she heard him murmuring something every now and then, and once she caught the words, 'The Lord is thy keeper; He that keepeth thee shall neither slumber nor sleep.' Later on in the afternoon she reminded her grandfather of her promise to go to the Hall, if he did not want her; and telling him cheerily that she would soon be back, she put on her hat and went off.

It was a lovely August afternoon, with that stillness and certainty which there is about late summer, and which you never seem to have in the earlier parts of the year, though the beauty and

the charm are fresher. Kitty took the longest way to the house: her heart was full, and she hardly knew how she should get on when she found herself in a large room, where she must sit still and read on steadily. The deep afternoon shadows were lying on the velvet turf; the beds of flowers were gorgeous in their colours as the sun shone upon them, bringing out the brilliant contrasts of scarlet and white, purple and gold, crimson and blue, so vividly that Kitty could not help stopping to look. 'Ah,' she thought, 'I know who planned all these! I wonder who will do them next year?' After dawdling as long as she could, she was obliged at last to go to the door and ring the bell. Poor Nora was lying there, looking unhappy and restless, evidently knowing that the trouble of the house was *her* trouble; but she wagged her tail and looked imploringly at Kitty, as though she were come on the sole mission of comforting *her*.

When Kitty was taken upstairs to Miss Eleanor Craven's room she found that she was expected, so she had little to say before she began her reading. The house looked sad, and the blind girl was so warm in her thanks, so gentle and kind in her manner, that poor Kitty had some difficulty in getting on, and read with a lump in her throat all the time. She was not sorry when tea was brought in, and Miss Craven said, 'Now, Kitty, your throat must be tired; take some tea: and perhaps you

will give me mine, and then I need not ring for any one to help me.' So Kitty gave the blind girl her tea, and then Miss Craven talked to her a good deal, and told her the history of her becoming blind. Kitty said, 'How miserable that must be!' 'No,' said Miss Craven, 'not *miserable*, though at first it tried me very much; but it has taught me how kind and loving all around me are: and I have so many other blessings to thank God for, that I need not murmur at the loss of one. You, as well as the rest, are kind to me to-day, Kitty; your reading is a great enjoyment, for you have been taught to read well. I suppose you read to your grandfather?' 'Yes, ma'am, I do sometimes,' said Kitty; 'but he is able to read for himself, and very fond he is of it.' So after they had talked a little more, and the tea was over, Miss Craven asked Kitty to read for another half hour, explaining a good deal to her as she went on, and Kitty was surprised to find how quickly the time had gone. When she asked if she should go home, and Miss Craven thanked her for her reading, she said,—

'Tell your grandfather you have been a great comfort to me to-day.'

Kitty's walk back to the cottage was a much quicker one than her walk to the Hall, partly because she was much happier. She recollected the day when her grandfather had told her to think

more of the troubles of others and less of her own, and she felt that perhaps, in her visit this afternoon, the petition had been answered which she had then offered up.

Kitty told her grandfather all she had been doing and hearing, and they talked on till it was dark. Kitty said she thought she understood a little more now what was meant by 'bearing one another's burdens,' and she asked her grandfather what the end of the verse had to do with it, 'and so fulfil the law of Christ.'

'Fetch your Bible, my child,' he answered; 'and see in the thirteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel if you don't find the meaning of the words. There it says, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another." That is the law of Christ. And then there is an end to this verse, too: "As I have loved you, that ye also love one another." Ah! when we think of the heavy burden which He bore, not only of sorrow but of sin; how wonderful it seems that He should think the little we can do for others a fulfilling of His law of love! But His mercies are great; and even the widow's mite and the cup of cold water are accepted in His sight, if offered by a loving heart.'

So the late summer and autumn passed away, with no very special events happening in the cottage. But Kitty was training day by day for a useful, happy life. Many were the small services she

could render to others, in spite of being much at home, and noticing, as she could not help noticing, that the old man's life was gradually fading away. She kept up with a brave heart, however, not caring or daring to look far into the future ; and when Christmas came, she wondered how the year had passed so quickly. She had learnt many lessons in the course of it, and though, while youth is fresh and vigorous, the heart looks joyously on to what is coming, and parts carelessly with what is past, even *she* did not hear without regret the parting peal of the village bells to the last moments of that old year.

CHAPTER III.

'I am bound—
You have my promise :
In a year—
I will bide my year.'

EARLY one morning in January the postman called at the cottage with a letter for Longley. His knocks at the door were not very frequent, and when they did come there was generally much curiosity as to who the letter might be from before it was opened. This time it was from Kitty's mother, asking if her grandfather could spare her to them at the farm for two or three weeks, provided Margaret took her

place with him. Longley consented, and Kitty answered the letter for him, saying she would be ready whenever Margaret arrived. Accordingly, in a few days Margaret was seen driving down the lane in her father's cart, which waited to take Kitty back. Even with the vision of home before her, Kitty felt sad when she came to say good-bye to her grandfather, and almost wished she had not consented to leave him. But it was all settled now, and the only thing was to tell him she would soon be back, and that he must write for her at once if Margaret did not take good care of him.

She sprang into the cart, and the road being tolerably good, the pony took her quickly over the three miles, and she was soon at her own door. There stood her mother, ready to welcome her; and many were the questions asked and answered before her father came in from the farm and they sat down to tea. The night was cold, and they were glad to draw closely round the cheerful fire, where they sat and talked till bed-time.

Kitty's thoughts flew back to Ashted. She wondered if Margaret were making the dear old grandfather comfortable for the night, and she wished she had told her much more than she had. She hoped Margaret would be careful of the fire and the candle. She wondered if her grandfather was missing her already—And in the midst of these thoughts she suddenly fell asleep, for she was tired, partly by

the drive, and the cold winter air, and partly with the pleasure of being at home again.

Next day she was busy helping her mother, and found enough to do, wondering often what Margaret was about. Things went on pretty much in the same way for the first week, when one afternoon, while she was feeding the poultry, she heard her name called by some one behind her, and though she was sure she knew the voice, her astonishment was great when she looked round and saw the speaker. At last she recovered herself sufficiently to say, 'Jim! what brings you here?—what can have happened?' 'Happened!' replied the young man; 'nothing has happened, except that I am come home; and I hope you will all be glad to see me.'

Now, if no one else was glad to see James Payne again Kitty was, for there had been an old friendship between those two, which Mrs. Longley always expected would grow into something stronger, but, wisely, had never mentioned the subject to Kitty, for James had set his heart on going to sea, and she thought it might all come to nothing: moreover, she was not altogether sure that she thought him good enough for her Kitty, of whom she was very proud. At one time there were doubts about his steadiness, and people hinted that he had got into trouble of some sort, and took to a sailor's life in order to escape from the neighbourhood. Kitty

always took his part, and latterly Mrs. Longley had been inclined to think that it was 'to make the crown a pound' that 'Jamie went to sea;' and she used to say, 'Time enough when he comes home, and we see what he turns out, and whether he really cares for Kitty, to let her know about it.' Now he had come, and, curiously enough, just when Kitty was with her father and mother.

Before another week had passed the old, old story was told, *the* question was asked and answered, and Kitty Longley was engaged to be married to James Payne.

Her father took it easily enough when it was once settled, though, like most men when a thing does not concern themselves, he would have had it put off till an indefinite period. Her mother, though glad at heart, now that she had made every possible inquiry about James from every possible source, and considered the testimony borne to his conduct satisfactory on the whole, was fidgety in the extreme; and poor Kitty, in spite of her happiness, began to long for the peace and rest of her grandfather's home. There was much to be thought of, too. How was her grandfather to be told? How would he take it? Would she have to leave him?—No, that she vowed she couldn't and wouldn't. Would James be able to get work at Ashted?—for of course Kitty couldn't marry him without work, and James declared he would never go to sea again. All these

things were a sore puzzle to Kitty, and she remembered the day when she had said, as she was poring over Miss Craven's book, 'Nobody knows what my burdens are !'.

'Grandfather wouldn't say now that I have got none,' she said to herself. 'Ah, well ! he has taught me where to take them all, little or great ; and, by-and-by, all things will come straight.' And so they did ; though Kitty had many troubled hours and many anxious thoughts first.

When the day came for her to go back to Ashted James Payne drove her over, and waited till the evening to take Margaret back. Neither she nor the old man had been told anything except that James had returned ; but he was so old a friend that they were not at all surprised to see him driving up with Kitty. Kitty took Margaret upstairs and let her into the secret, and meanwhile James told their grandfather. It was rather a shock to him at first, but he had recovered it by the time Kitty came down again, and, taking a hand of each, he held them in his own, as he said slowly, 'God Almighty bless you, my children, and make you to live all your life in His fear and love ; and remember, "bear ye one another's burdens."'

Still the great question remained, What was James to do ? for work he must, and it was very bad for him to be idle even now. Happily, this did not long remain a difficulty, for Mr. Craven,

who heard the whole thing from Longley, offered to have him taught the bailiff's business, as he was not altogether satisfied with the man he now had. If he proved himself up to the work, he and Kitty might live with Longley, and so Kitty need not be parted from her grandfather. This arrangement was indeed a kind and happy one for all, and James took to the business well and quickly.

Kitty's father and mother objected to her marrying until he was regularly installed as bailiff; so for another year she was left to take the sole charge of her grandfather. It was a happy year for her, though sometimes she found the waiting a little long, and of course there were often stumbling-stones and difficulties in her path that seemed hard to get over. 'The course of true love never did run smooth,' and why should it in her case more than in any other? She, as well as others, must be trained by the mixture of joy and sorrow which makes up almost all human lives. The sunshine and the rain must each do their work before the flowers of the garden can unfold in their full beauty, or the fruit hang upon the trees in ripened clusters.

CHAPTER IV.

' No smile is like the smile of death,
When all good musings past
Rise wafted with the parting breath,
The sweetest thought the last.'

IT was on a bright April morning that James Payne and Katherine Longley were married. If they were happy, all nature was in sympathy with them. The birds sang for joy, the fresh green leaves trembled for joy, the young lambs danced for joy, and there was not even the drawback of a soft April shower to spoil Kitty's white dress as she came out of church, or to cockle the white ribbons of her hat, in which Margaret had twined a wreath of the sweetest white violets, gathered in the woods very early in the morning. If 'happy is the bride that the sun shines upon,' Kitty was indeed a happy bride. Her grandfather's absence was the only drawback to her joy ; but she knew she had his prayers and his blessing, and she felt very thankful that now her husband would share in the teaching and the love which had made her life so different from the lives of other girls of her own age.

When Kitty and James went to Ashted and took possession of their home, they found that many little comforts had been added to those already in the cottage by the kindness of their friends at the

Hall. James entered at once on his work as bailiff, and Kitty found her time well filled up between attending to her husband and her grandfather. Very quickly the days flew by, and very often the old man would ask James, with a smile, if he didn't think he owed him a great deal for training such an industrious, helpful wife for him? James thought Kitty would have been just as nice, whether she had been trained or no, but he did not say it!

So all that spring and summer things went on very happily. Kitty would often find time still to go up to the Hall and read to the blind young lady; and now they were all cheery again, for there was good news from the absent one in India. Mr. Craven was well satisfied with James, and Kitty's cup of happiness seemed full.

It was August 30th, just about two years after Mr. Craven had left England, that Kitty went to take her husband's tea to him at the farm. They were very busy that day, as the corn had been cut, and they were carrying it in, and all the labourers had their hands full. James had told Kitty when they were at dinner that he could not spare the time to come home to tea, and she promised he should have it at the farm. On her return she noticed a change in her grandfather's appearance, and on going up to him she found he could scarcely speak. The paralysed side was more helpless than before, and the use of the hand was quite gone. Kitty

was sadly frightened, and did not know what to do. She feared to leave him to go for the doctor, and her husband was too far to hear her call. Happily, one of the villagers was on her way to the farm, on the same errand that had just taken Kitty there. Almost breathless with anxiety, Kitty implored her to run at once, and tell the doctor that her grandfather was dying, which the woman of course magnified into the fact that he was dead. This was not likely to quicken the doctor's movements, though he came before very long; but to Kitty every minute seemed an hour. He saw at once how things were: there had been a second paralytic stroke, and in Longley's enfeebled state, and at his age, it was useless to hope for recovery. He did what he could, but that was very little, and he told Kitty before leaving the house that she must watch him very closely, for that any minute might be his last. She could hardly choke down her sobs, and her heart seemed breaking; but she knew it would not do to give way, and she kept up bravely till her husband returned. Hearing his step, she ran quickly to the door, that she might tell him all before he came in; but the strain had been kept up too long, and now the burst of grief came, and the poor child cried so bitterly that James was really frightened, and carried her into the house, without being able to gain an idea of what was the matter. But one look at the old man's face told him all. His first

thought was thankfulness that Kitty had not to bear this alone, her first *great* sorrow ; and after quieting her and comforting her, and hearing from her what the doctor had said, he sent up to the Hall to let the Cravens know that their faithful and valued servant was probably near his end. They were sending and coming backwards and forwards all that sad evening, taking everything that could be thought of in the way of food or medicine. To lose Longley would be to lose a dear friend, whom they had known and trusted all their lives, and they could scarcely realise that the trouble was indeed so near. They would see the doctor for themselves, to ask if nothing could be done ; they would send for another, so as to have a second opinion. But it was too evident that life was ebbing fast, and that not only the days but the hours of the old man's life were numbered. He revived a little about ten o'clock, and would occasionally say something that could be understood. Kitty eagerly caught at every word. Once he told her he should like to receive the Holy Communion in the morning, and she promised it should be as he wished ; but before the morning came he was in closer communion with his blessed Saviour than even when partaking of that Holy Sacrament, by which He sustains the spiritual life of His faithful ones here below.

Night drew on, and James and Kitty silently

took their places by the side of the dying man. Oh, that last night-watch by one we love ! Are there any among us, even of the young, who cannot recall it ? The clinging to the veriest gossamer thread of hope—no, not hope, for there is none, but of the barest possibility ; the plotting and planning of what shall be done in case of recovery, which all the time we know is never coming, till we have rendered ourselves almost stony with the desperate efforts to throw off despair, and then the helpless giving in to the sad certainty, while we can hardly refrain from crying out, ‘Lord, if Thou wert here he would not die ;’ and, perhaps, from those loved lips we catch a broken sentence which tells us plainly that He *is* here ; that ‘the Master is come,’ and calleth for His servant. Yes, we have most of us gone through it, and it seems strange, after having been in such a heavenly Presence, that we should come back so coolly, and as a matter of course, to the every-day life we lead. But so it is ; and Kitty suffered, just as we have done.

Every now and then the silence was broken by snatches of prayers from the dying man. Once she caught the words, ‘By Thine Agony and Bloody Sweat, by Thy Cross and Passion ;’ then, ‘Lord, remember me !’—words always precious to him, and which he constantly used ; then, ‘I am not worthy to be called Thy son.’ The last words she distinctly heard were, ‘The Blood of Jesus Christ

cleanseth me from all sin.' There were a few heavy breathings, then short ones, till at last a short, gentle sigh freed the spirit from the burden of the flesh. James and Kitty knew it was all over, yet they neither spoke nor moved. The tremendous hush of death, the awful stillness which itself seems like another presence, the silence which is as a 'darkness that may be felt,' all kept them motionless. Kitty was kneeling, holding her grandfather's hand, and looking into the dear face as if she expected him to speak again; but when James came to take her away she knew that they were parted, and sobbed as though her heart would break. Nothing would console her at first, for almost all her early life had been bound up with the old man, and James felt it better to let her sorrow have its way. She did not want for comforters. She, who had been taught by the lips now silent to do her best in bearing the burden of others, found that there were, indeed, many willing and anxious to bear hers, and after the first few bitter days her sorrow became gentle and subdued.

They laid him to rest in the village churchyard. It was one of those bright, sunny days in early September, when the softness of the summer air still lingers, and the brightness of the summer sun has not yet waned. The little band of mourners stood beside the open grave, and the birds in their sweet songs seemed to echo the words of strong consola-

tion which the Church has chosen to proclaim her faith and hope, even in the very face of death—‘I am the Resurrection and the Life.’ How could Kitty have borne her grief, but for this assurance? Even with the words still ringing in her ears she quite broke down when they lowered the coffin into the grave; but James held her up, and with his help she placed upon it a wreath of white roses and geraniums. All the family from the Hall were there, and flowers were plentifully thrown into the grave when the service was over. Kitty went home to the same house, but oh! how different! It was like beginning another life. The garden was desolate, the house was desolate, the room was desolate, and yet the presence of the departed seemed to linger about it all. She went to her work with the feeling that he might be very near her still, and in time this remained, and the sense of utter desolation left her.

Mr. Craven put a plain marble cross at the head of the grave; on it were the words,—

EDWARD LONGLEY,
DIED AUGUST 30TH, 18—, AGED 76.

And underneath, the text so continually on his lips,—

‘LORD, REMEMBER ME!’

It was always a sacred place to Kitty, and in after years, as her own children grew up, the story

of the grandfather's life of love and death of peace was one they were never tired of hearing, and many were the daisy and primrose wreaths, and bunches of sweet violets, that were placed by tiny hands on the garden grave of Edward Longley.

FERNSEED;
OR,
THE WOODLAND FAIRY.
By BLANCHE PECHELL.

PART I.

'Come ye, come ye to the green, green wood,
Loudly the blackbird is singing;
The squirrel is feasting on blossom and bud,
And the curling fern is springing.'

DEEP in a Scotch wood lives the Fern Fairy. Such a still, mossy wood, where every grey stone has a soft green mantle, but round the Fairy's palace it is even greener and softer still, and the tall ferns are interlaced, as her body-guard, to keep intruders away. The little rabbits can hop through, and the ferns give way to them, for their tiny feet do not spoil the moss carpet, and if they now and then nibble a bit, the Fairy forgives them; but she hates to hear the heavy tread of mortals in her domain, and when they come to dig up her subjects by the roots, she is still more angry.

Slowly and silently the wood had changed from its winter to its summer dress. The ferns had sprung up in their beauty, and between the stems of tall fir-trees the heather could be seen coming into bloom, while wood-pigeons cooed and bees hummed peacefully.

The Fern Fairy was lying on her moss couch ; a purple and brown butterfly spread its wings over her head to keep off the sun, and a little white moth fanned her gently to sleep, and then settled on a wood-sorrel leaf to watch her slumbers and warn the humble-bees to subdue their droning voices. Lower and lower fell the sun, darting his glances through the fir-boughs ; the butterfly was getting tired and longing for his evening sip of honey, and the moth yawned and crawled to a fresh leaf, when suddenly the Fairy started up, wide awake, frightening her two guardians.

‘What did your Royal Highness hear?’ they exclaimed.

‘The tread of a mortal,’ answered she. ‘I felt it through every nerve. Stand firm, fern-soldiers!’

And they did stand firm. Tightly their stems crossed and re-crossed each other, while the mortal pushed through. A harmless-looking mortal enough ; a girl who did not carry either basket or spade, and as she sat on the stones looking dreamily around, the Fern Fairy breathed more freely, knowing that she was invisible to those whose eyelids had not

been touched with Fernseed, and that to few indeed had that privilege been granted. Elsie only saw the moth and the butterfly fluttering near her, and little thought they had such a treasure to guard.

But soon the Fairy was again troubled, for now the girl seemed to be hunting for plants, though as yet she did not attack the ferns.

‘She will come back,’ said the Fairy; but Elsie could not hear that small voice, and ere long she wandered away down the wood paths.

Then the Fairy, standing on a tree-root, spoke thus to her subjects:—

‘Ferns, great and small, listen and beware! The invader of our peace will come again. You did stand fast, brave ferns, but next time you must be more ready. Trip up the intruder; dash into her face to keep her back. Good moss-tufts, hold the rain to wet her feet. I shall be near to encourage you, and meantime I will take counsel of our friend Heartsease, who lives with these mortals and knows their ways.’

The ferns bowed respectfully, and the Fairy called her steed, ‘Daddylonglegs,’ and left the wood.

Heartsease was a quiet homely little fairy who might have ruled a kingdom, but chose rather to live in the old tower of the castle near the wood, and make all the inmates as happy as possible. There was a large room at the top of this tower, with three little turrets projecting from three cor-

ners ; it had fireplaces at each end, and cases full of books against the walls, and when the guests in the castle came up to the tower to look at the books or enjoy the lovely view, they wondered why they felt so happy, little thinking that Fairy Heartsease lived in the south turret. Sometimes she flitted down and waved her wand over the sunny drawing-room, just to keep her spell in force, but soon returned to her work, for she was an industrious fairy. The click of her knitting-needles and the hum of her spinning-wheel could be heard even at night ; and when people slept under the turrets, they fancied the noise was made by mice. How the Fairy laughed when they said so to each other !

She was gazing from her turret window in the gloaming when the Fern Fairy appeared, gracefully sitting upon her prancing steed, who landed her safely upon the window-sill.

‘ Dear Princess Lastrea,’ exclaimed Heartsease, ‘ I am so glad to see you ; now we can have a long talk, for they are just gone, and will not come back till long after moon-rise.’

“ ‘ They ! ’ who do you mean ? Oh, those dreadful mortals,” answered the Fern Fairy, as she fastened Daddylonglegs to a cobweb outside the window.

‘ Indeed, they are not dreadful,’ said Heartsease : ‘ but now you must rest on my sofa after your long ride.’

Princess Lastrea, with a sigh of relief, reclined

upon the blind-tassel, while Heartsease sat on a rosebud left behind by one of the mortals, and of course went on with her knitting.

‘It is about these fearful mortals that I have come to speak to you, Heartsease,’ began the Princess. ‘I have no doubt you can tell me which of them dared to invade my territory to-day, penetrating even to my palace, and dashing through my guards, who tried in vain to keep her back. I awoke at the moment and looked at her keenly. She was a girl-mortal, with fair hair, and she was dressed in black and white, like a water-wagtail.’

Heartsease smiled brightly.

‘She is my best friend amongst them all. Why should you fear her, Princess? what harm did she do you?’

‘She has done no harm as yet,’ replied Fern Fairy, sadly, ‘but I saw a cruel purpose in her face, as she looked round upon my subjects. She will come again, and drag them from their homes to languish and to die. Oh, Heartsease, if you know this girl, speak to her I entreat you; ask her not to destroy my children;’ and Princess Lastrea started up and clasped her hands excitedly.

But Heartsease hastened to wave her magic wand, till the Princess laughed, saying,—

‘What a wonderful comforter you are, Heartsease! now tell me what I am to do?’

‘On three conditions, Princess.’

‘What are they?’

‘First, that you will not be angry ; secondly, that you won’t interrupt me ; thirdly, that I may go on with my knitting.’

‘Agreed to all, you strange creature!’ answered the Fern Fairy.

Heartsease paused to count her stitches, and then began : ‘That girl of whom you are so afraid has been my friend for a long time. Five years ago (before you began to reign), she found out that I lived up here, and whenever she comes alone we have pleasant talks. I don’t know how she discovered me ; she says it was something in herself that made her see me so clearly. She has loved fairies all her life, and I know she would not willingly vex one of us ; but I also know that she much wishes to take some of your subjects away to her southern home—not to languish and to die, as you fear, Princess, but to be treated with the greatest care, till they grow and flourish as well, or even better, than in their native wood.’

Princess Lastrea shook her head vehemently at this, but Heartsease continued : ‘The next time I see Elsie alone, I will tell her of your distress, and of the war that will be waged against her, but I don’t think she will give up her scheme, except on one condition.’ Heartsease let fall her knitting, and looking earnestly at the Fairy, uttered the word ‘Fernseed.’

‘Never!’ exclaimed Princess Lastrea.

‘Well, I suppose you know best,’ said Heartsease, quietly; ‘but in my days it was allowed to many mortals, and no harm came of it. I am sure my friend Elsie longs for a sight of a woodland fairy, and if you could hear from her own lips how gentle she would be with your subjects, I think you might be inclined to trust her. Now I have finished my long story, Princess, and you have listened most patiently.’

‘But I am not convinced, Heartsease, and I can’t give way about Fernseed; I have never been seen by mortal eye since I came to my kingdom, and it is a privilege I do not mean to grant. I must leave the matter in your hands, hoping that you will persuade this Elsie to give up her cruel scheme. Now I must go, for I see Daddylonglegs is getting restless.’

And refusing all Heartsease’s offers of honeydew, Princess Lastrea mounted her steed and flew away.

Heartsease had a long talk with Elsie the next time they were alone together, but the girl was determined to take some ferns, unless her eyelids might be touched with Fernseed, and this, Heartsease feared, would never be; so no more was said on the subject. But after awhile the watchful guards, who were now on the alert, heard footsteps once more drawing near to the fairy palace. This

time Elsie looked formidable. A little spade was in one hand, and a basket, which already held some of the Fern Fairy's family, was in the other. Princess Lastrea's soldiers fought with courage, and she herself flew up and down on Daddylonglegs, urging them to victory. Midges and flies worried Elsie's face ; moss-tufts soaked her shoes ; fern-stalks clung together to keep her back, and one nearly succeeded in tripping her up, while others whisked their long fronds into her eyes : but all in vain. Steadily she came on ; pushing aside the ferns, brushing away the flies, and stepping lightly over the wet moss, and then stooping down she lifted some plants gently into her basket, taking plenty of soft moss with them. After this she stood still to listen to the woodpigeons' cooing, with a sad, wistful expression in her face. The Fern Fairy did not say a word to her soldiers when Elsie turned to leave the spot, but they were as fierce as before, and tried to keep her prisoner. Once more she quietly passed through, and Princess Lastrea sighed, instead of speaking severely to the guards (as they expected), and looked after the retreating figure, almost as if she wished her to return.

And so Elsie went away to the south, and took the ferns with her, but on the last morning ere she started she paid a farewell visit to her dear friend Heartsease, and left a message for Princess Lastrea which was duly delivered. Again the two fairies

talked over the fernseed question, and Heartsease was not without hope that the Princess would yield in time.

PART II.

SUMMER was fading fast. Here and there a golden frond shone out amongst the ferns, telling of the Frost-king's touch ; the rowan-branches drooped with their heavy clusters of scarlet berries, and gossamer threads floated in the air, clinging like a silvery net-work to the bents and thistles in the sunny fields. Then the fairies' work began. From dawn to moonlight they gathered and wound the shining threads, to be woven into robes for their Queen. It was a merry harvest, and all joined in it, though some did not do much work. Heartsease came down from her tower in a little carriage drawn by four honey-bees, and, of course, she was not idle. Her favourite place was in a field which sloped to the west and blended into the brown moorland, where the last rays of red sunlight lingered longest, and where wild heartseases held the gossamer ready for her to wind it. Even Princess Lastrea made believe to be busy, but she never stayed long ; the sheltered wood was her delight, and she either shivered in the breeze, or was scorched by the sunshine. And when the fern-

soldiers put on their brown uniform, and dead leaves came showering down upon the moss, she took refuge in her winter palace underground, which had been hollowed out by her servants the humble-bees. There she slept on her couch of cotton-grass through short days and long nights, while the Frost-king and the Snow-queen were reigning over the land.

Heartsease, in the shelter of her turret, did not heed the wintry weather, and found plenty of work to be done; for there was a new baby-girl in the castle (called after Elsie), and the fairy watched over her continually. Everybody said they never saw such a good-tempered, happy baby, though no one knew of the magic wand which was often waved over her cradle.

At last the spring came back again. Slowly the young ferns uncurled themselves, and Princess Lastrea, wrapped closely in a brown mantle, peeped out of her palace. She looked upon a world of grey branches and swelling buds, of primroses and delicate wood-sorrel blooming amidst the moss. A thrush was filling the air with its ringing notes, and far away a blackbird whistled softly. The fairy felt almost tempted to go forth into the sunshine, but the next moment a cold blast of wind sent her back to her warm couch. She made many attempts of the same kind, till one day a yellow butterfly appeared with a message from Heartsease, begging

for the honour of a visit from the Princess. Then the Fern Fairy believed that winter was really at an end, and seating herself between the butterfly's wings, she soon arrived at the castle.

She found Heartsease on the sunny terrace, nestling in an ivy-leaf close to the drawing-room window, and watching the children, especially her favourite, Baby Elsie, as she passed backwards and forwards in the nurse's arms. As soon as Princess Lastrea had stepped upon the same leaf, the butterfly flitted away, and the little ones ran after it, but 'Yellow-wings' was too quick for them, and rose above their reach.

Then the Princess turned to Heartsease, exclaiming angrily,—

'Look at those little mortal children! they wanted to destroy my poor steed. That is why I hate all the mortals, they are so cruel.'

'Not cruel, Princess, only thoughtless,' answered Heartsease.

'Want of thought leads to cruelty, and they are all alike,—young and old,—nothing will ever cure them.'

'What dismal words on the first spring day, my Princess! I am more hopeful of cure if you will try the experiment upon one mortal whom I know.'

'I do believe you have been thinking of Fernseed all the winter, Heartsease,' said the Princess, laughing. 'As for me, I was much too cold and sleepy

then to think about anything ; but now the sun has warmed and awakened me, and I promise you that when summer comes I will ask all the fairies to meet, and settle the matter. You know it concerns every one of us, for this girl-mortal will have the power of seeing us all.'

The Fern Fairy kept her word. On a lovely June evening, when the wood was hushed and shadowy in the soft twilight, there was a gathering of tiny forms in Princess Lastrea's summer palace. Heartsease was amongst them, and spoke eagerly in favour of her friend, and she was joined by those fairies who lived nearest to the castle and had seen Elsie, but the rest took the other side, so the discussion lasted till darkness fell, and the glowworms had lighted their lamps. The end was not quite satisfactory to Heartsease, who went back to her turret rather sadly. She had hoped to have greeted Elsie with the good news that her wish would be granted immediately, but the decree had been issued that 'the mortal' should go through a month's probation, and these were the terms fixed upon:—

First—Elsie must not pick any flowers or ferns unnecessarily, or if obliged to do so, she must keep them alive as long as possible.

Secondly—She must not tease, hurt, or kill any bird, beast, or insect, or disturb their nests or homes.

And thirdly—She must try to prevent her fellow-

mortals, especially children, from indulging in thoughtless cruelty, or doing harm to any living thing.

‘Your friend will not find it so easy to keep these rules,’ said the Princess Lastrea to Heartsease, with a smile of triumph: ‘and she will have plenty of ridicule and opposition to bear.’

‘I have faith in her,’ answered Heartsease, simply. However, she succeeded in so far softening the sentence that Elsie’s first offence was to be forgiven; and for the second offence, the time of trial would be lengthened by another month; but the third would be fatal: no Fernseed would ever be granted to her or to any other mortal!

Meanwhile the unconscious Elsie was counting the days till she could return to the old castle; and when that happy hour came she hastened to climb the winding granite steps, but no Fairy Heartsease was to be found in the tower room.

In vain Elsie searched every turret, and peered from the windows.

‘Perhaps she is here all the time, and I have lost the power of seeing her,’ she said to herself, and went very sadly down the stairs. But still she felt sure that Heartsease had not deserted the castle, for her happy influence was present everywhere, and the next day Elsie found her in her usual place.

‘So you really were not here yesterday,’ said the

girl, after the first greetings. 'Cruel Heartsease ! to go away when you knew that I was coming.'

'I went away on purpose,' said the Fairy. 'I wanted to get my last orders from Princess Lastrea.'

'That is the Fern Fairy,' exclaimed Elsie. 'Oh Heartsease, am I to have Fernseed? I have thought of it so often all the winter.'

'So have I,' answered Heartsease quietly.

And then she told the story of her hopes and fears, and of the fairies' decision, while Elsie listened eagerly, saying with a long sigh,—

'Oh, I *will* try so hard to gain it, and you will help me, dear Heartsease. You always do help everybody. I am not much afraid of failing by hurting animals, for I would not wilfully kill anything except wasps and earwigs, but I know I often pick flowers.'

Then after a pause,—

'So my trial begins to-morrow ! Please tell me the rules once more, for I must learn them by heart.'

Everybody thought that Elsie was unusually grave that evening, and the next morning, instead of rushing off to gather flowers as usual, she busied herself in trying to revive all the drooping ones in the house, and in carefully letting out some bees and butterflies that were fluttering on the window-panes.

Heartsease had allowed her to speak of her probation to the other mortals,

'You can tell them if you like, though they won't believe you,' she said, and Elsie felt that she was right, and meant to keep silent as long as possible. But she was soon obliged to give a reason for these changed ways, and some of her friends ridiculed her, but those who loved her best helped her, and humoured 'the fancy,' as they called it. Indeed she needed help, for her trial was greater than she expected. Every moment of the day seemed to bring a new temptation. The children came running to her with daisies to be made into chains, and she was obliged to refuse, and to gather up the poor flowers, crushed by little hands, and try to keep them alive in water. Surely the wasps and earwigs never teased her so much before, and even the black-beetles came into her room !

Heartsease listened to many doleful stories whenever Elsie could run up to the tower for a private talk ; but the good fairy generally managed to cheer her friend, especially when the first week had gone by without one failure. Perhaps this made the girl less watchful, for the very next day she came to Heartsease with a dismal face, saying,—

'You praised me too soon, Heartsease, for I caught a poor little fish to-day !'

'That does not signify,' answered the fairy—'you know the first offence is to be forgiven.'

'Ah, but the second will come next, and then the dreadful third ; I must tell you what happened .

this afternoon. I went in the boat on the lake, it was so lovely, and I never thought they were going to fish. I did not even notice the rods till we had reached the middle of the lake, and somebody put one into my hand ; then in another minute there was a wretched little fish struggling on the hook ! I was so sorry, and I threw down the rod, and begged hard to be rowed to shore, but they would not hear of it, and I had to stay ever so long, and see many fish caught, in spite of my entreaties. At last they teased me till I cried, and was cross, so I have been wrong in every way. And Elsie sighed wearily.

But Fairy Heartsease put aside her spinning, and waved her wand over the girl's head, till she looked up with a bright smile, and exclaimed,—

‘You have made me feel quite happy again, dear Heartsease. I should like to give you a kiss, only I am so afraid of hurting you. How I wish I were smaller !’

‘We will blow kisses to each other,’ said the fairy, ‘and you must not think of your failure any more. Above all, never be cross ; *that* is a far greater offence in my eyes than killing a little fish without intending it !’

PART III.

THE last week of probation had come. Elsie had a long solitary afternoon before her, and started to wander over the moor, looking forward to her return to her usual visit to the tower.

Crossing the lawn, she paused on a little bridge, to look at the sparkling brown water of the burn as it rushed under her feet. Up the hill she climbed, where the fairies had gathered gossamer in the autumn, and there lay the moor stretched before her, purple with heather, white with cotton-grass; the free fresh wind blowing 'from the gates of the sun,' the curlews whistling, the grouse crowing—everything to tempt her onward. But were they really curlews and grouse, or did some malicious fairies imitate their voices, and entice the girl-mortal into an enchanted land, where all promises would be forgotten?

No such thought crossed Elsie's mind, as she rambled on, singing merrily; but before long she began to pick tufts of heather, and bluebells, and the lively little flowers abounding on the moor. At last the rooks, flying home in a long string to their nests near the castle, warned her that it was time to turn her back upon the sunset, and no sooner had her feet left the wild moorland for the grassy hill,

than the spell was broken ; she gazed at her flowers in dismay, and sank down on the ground, throwing them from her. But soon collecting them again carefully, she walked slowly home, and straight up to the tower ; startling Heartsease by the exclamation, 'It is all over ! See what I have done !'

And so saying she laid the flowers before her.

The fairy looked at them gravely.

'Only the second offence,' she said. 'Why is it "all over?"'

'Have you forgotten the penalty?' answered Elsie, in a piteous voice ; 'another month's probation ! I shall be far away before then, and even if I were to stay, I could not go through it. No, I shall never gain the Fernseed privilege now. Oh, Heartsease, your wand will fail to make me happy this time.'

Heartsease was lost in thought, and did not attempt to wave the wand till she saw the tears in her friend's eyes ; then she took it up quickly, and in a moment Elsie roused herself :

'What shall I do, Heartsease?'

'That is a sensible question,' answered the fairy, 'and now we can talk it over calmly.'

They came to the conclusion that Heartsease should pay another visit to the Princess, and ask her to reckon the flower-gathering as the first offence, overlooking the death of the little fish, as it was unintentionally done.

Accordingly when the moon peeped round the

corner of the castle, and lighted up Heartsease's turret, she sallied forth on her expedition.

Of course the bees would not go out at night, so Heartsease was obliged to mount a sorry steed—a large brown moth, who had spoilt his beauty by foolishly dashing himself into a candle one evening, in Elsie's room. She had saved his life, and he escaped with singed wings, which caused his pace to become a sort of jog-trot; but quiet Heartsease was contented, and in due time she arrived at the mossy retreat where Princess Lastrea held her court. Amongst the guests, Heartsease spied the moorland fairies who had led Elsie astray, and at once gave up all thoughts of speaking of her friend at that time, but resolved to ask for a private interview.

The princess was in a very gracious mood, and promised to go to the castle; 'for I know how busy you always are, Heartsease, though why you work so hard I never can understand. By-the-by, how is your friend the girl-mortal getting on?'

Princess Lastrea said this in a constrained voice, and glanced at the moorland fairies.

Heartsease answered with a smile: 'I am sure your Royal Highness must have heard each day of Elsie from your attendants, but I don't suppose any one knows her merits as well as I do.'

'You are as faithful as ever, I see,' and the Fern Fairy turned away, and talked to other guests.

But the next day she came to the tower according to her promise.

It was just at sunset, the usual time for Elsie's visit, and Heartsease was expecting her anxiously, but did not say a word to the Princess, for fear she should hurry away. If she could only see Elsie again, and hear her often-expressed wish for Fernseed, Heartsease felt sure that no more pleadings of her own would be required.

She had just begun upon the important subject, when the door opened gently, and Elsie came in. Princess Lastrea started up, but Heartsease whispered eagerly, 'Pray stay; remember you are invisible to her;' and the Fern Fairy yielded, watching the girl-mortal attentively.

Elsie looked sad, as she took her favourite place close to Heartsease, saying, 'I suppose you have no good news for me?'

'Not yet,' replied the fairy.

'But was the Princess kind? and do you think there is any hope?'

'I could not ask her the question last night; to-morrow I may be able to tell you what she says.'

At another time, Elsie would have observed that Heartsease was more silent than usual, but the girl was too much absorbed in her own trouble, and went on talking without waiting for the fairy to speak again.

'Oh, if Princess Lastrea would only understand

that I did not mean to kill that little fish ! I was really made to do it. In that case picking the flowers on the moor would be my first failure, and she promised to forgive that. I am quite sure I was bewitched yesterday, for I seemed to forget everything till I left the heather, and you know how I have tried to remember ! If I had never gone to that fatal moor, I should be so happy now, for the week will soon come to an end.'

Elsie looked up as she spoke, and suddenly exclaimed, 'Oh, there's a poor Daddy-long-legs caught in a spider's web ! I must let him out;' and she ran towards the window.

'You had better not touch him,' said Heartsease, laughing, 'that is Princess Lastrea's steed !'

'The Princess ! Has she been here ?'

'She is here now, close to you.'

'Where ? where ?' cried Elsie, looking round excitedly ;—'Oh, I forgot that I cannot see her, but she can see me.'

'Fairy Princess,' she continued, clasping her hands and making a low courtesy, 'you have heard all that I have said to Heartsease. Will you not grant my petition ? I have tried so hard to gain the Fernseed privilege, and indeed I will be a good friend to ferns, and flowers, and every living thing for the rest of my life.'

There was a pause of a few moments. At last Heartsease said : 'The Princess bids me tell you

that the favour is granted, and the offence forgiven. Hush!' and she made a sign for silence,—‘the Princess also says, that you may consider your probation over to-day, and receive the gift of Fernseed to-morrow.’

Elsie sprang up, crying out, ‘How delightful ! But there goes Daddylonglegs, and I am afraid the Princess is gone too ! I wanted to thank her.’

‘Never mind,’ said Heartsease, smiling. ‘She does not like thanks. How glad I am you came in while she was here ! I knew she could not resist you ;’ and the kind little fairy touched Elsie’s cheek caressingly with her wand.

* * * * *

The Fern Fairy felt almost ashamed of what she had done, as she journeyed back to her palace. She had been conquered by a mortal, and her pride was humbled. The moorland fairies had told her of their scheme for tempting Elsie, and Princess Lastrea had rejoiced with them over its success, but now she must summon them with all the others, and confess that she had given way. There was no time to be lost, so the Princess despatched her messengers, and butterflies, bees, gnats, and dragonflies hurried away in all directions.

Again the moonbeams shone upon a meeting of the fairies. Heartsease kept herself in the back-

ground, but the Fern Fairy beckoned to her, and she was obliged to obey and to stand near the Princess while she made her speech. In a few words she told them what had happened, and then taking Heartsease's hand and leading her forward, the Princess added, 'You will think that I have been influenced by my dear friend here, as you know that it was she who first proposed to give the privilege of Fernseed to the mortal. You know also that I resisted it for a long time ; but now my mind has been changed by seeing and hearing the mortal herself, and not through any arguments used by Fairy Heartsease, so I beg that all blame and responsibility may rest upon me. I am sure that this girl-mortal is worthy of the great honour that we propose to bestow upon her, and that we shall never repent of our decision.'

'Some of the fairies shook their heads, and whispered together when Princess Lastrea had finished, but they did not make any objection, for they saw that the matter was settled. Only the moorland fairies looked cross, saying : 'The Princess always will have her own way.'

When Heartsease tried to thank the Fern Fairy for her kind words, she would not listen.

'I was not a bit kind,' she said. 'I only told the truth, and I did not choose that you should have either the credit or the blame.'

And then she gave many directions for Elsie on the morrow.

That wonderful morrow, which dawned at last ! But Elsie was obliged to wait patiently till the afternoon ; and when she trod the mossy wood-paths again, lit up by the slanting sunbeams, and listened to the sighing of the evening breeze through the fir-boughs, and to the voices of the wood-pigeons, it seemed like an echo of the past year. But she soon found that there was a great change ; for now the way was open, and, instead of fighting against her, the fern-soldiers bent back at her slightest touch. Her heart beat fast with expectation when she reached the enchanted spot, but she sat down quietly and closed her eyes, according to the orders she had received, while a feeling of rest and peace came over her. It was not sleep, for she was conscious of every woodland sound, and seemed to hear the fluttering of soft wings around her face. At length something passed gently across her eyelids, and then she knew that the gift of Fernseed had been bestowed, and that she might gaze upon fairy-land ; but for a minute she delayed and covered her face with her hands. Now that this great wish of her heart was granted, Elsie trembled lest she should be disappointed, but when she did look up, her brightest dreams were realized.

The wood was alive with sprites and fairies, nestling in each flower, poising themselves on ferns, and

delicate grass-blades, or floating in the air ; while Princess Lastrea sat conspicuous amongst them on her mossy throne.

Presently she waved her wand, and two fairies flew toward Elsie, bearing blooms of honeysuckle, which they put into her ears, and instantly she was able to hear the fairies' voices. They were speaking kindly of her, but Elsie did not feel really at home till Heartsease arrived and whispered,—

‘Are you happy now?’

‘Indeed I am happy,’ answered the girl—‘it is quite wonderful and beautiful ! I can’t believe that I have lived in the midst of Fairy-land without knowing it. I always fancied that it would be a different country, but this is the same dear old wood, and now I see that the whole world is full of fairies, and that I have been blind.’

Suddenly while she was speaking she found herself surrounded by butterflies, moths, and other insects, and amongst them were many fairies, each dressed in the petals of the flowers they represented. The Princess came forward and said,—

‘Elsie, these are the creatures whose lives you have spared, and the fairies of the flowers which you have revived. They have come to thank you. We all feel that you deserve to see us, and that you will cherish the gift you now possess.’

Elsie promised in a low voice, but she was still bewildered, and could only gaze silently, till the

gathering twilight warned her to turn her steps homeward.

‘ You must come again and look at us by moonlight,’ said the Fern Fairy.

And all the little voices echoed, ‘ Come !’

Elsie was never lonely any more.

When she passed by the lake, the Meadow-sweet Fairies bowed and kissed their hands to her, and the Fairy of the Waterlily would wave a greeting while rocking softly on her snow-white couch. In the garden, in the field, or in the woods, the fairies were ever by her side, and even on the wild moor they gathered round her, to beg pardon for their former malice. Elsie’s forgiveness was easily gained ; her days were full of sunshine, and she spent many happy hours in talking of her fairy friends to the children and teaching them to be kind to all living creatures. She would often run up to the tower and give an account of her doings to Heartsease, who now shared in her friend’s joy as formerly in her troubles.

One of Elsie’s greatest pleasures was to find that all the animals and flowers trusted her. With the help of the honeysuckle tubes she could understand the language of birds and insects, and often heard such words as these :—

‘ Take care ! there is somebody coming !’

‘ Oh, it is only Elsie, who never hurts anything.’

And then the creatures would pause in their flight to look at her, and the flowers seemed to bend towards her with gratitude and affection.

At last the time came for leaving the dear northern land, and bidding farewell to Heartsease, and Princess Lastrea, and all the fairies ; but Elsie went away with a lighter heart than usual, for she had a mission to fulfil.

‘I shall find your sisters in the south,’ she said, ‘and I will try and persuade people to be kind and loving to everything in this beautiful world, so that all may gain the magic power of Fernseed.’

‘He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small ;
For the dear God Who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.’

PINK RIBBONS.

By MRS. JEROME MERCIER.

‘Love is a present for a mighty king.’

Nor far from St. Paul's Cathedral is a nook in the city of London where a few lilac-bushes and two plane-trees, fenced with iron railings, grow green in spring, and, alas! grey with dust and soot very early in the summer. Yet, even then, they represent the country to some eyes, and a girl who sold violets used to like to take her stand near them, and dream herself far away in the Hampshire woods.

To Jane Heath, who used to sit and sew in her grandmother's attic opposite, the trees, and the violets too, were a real refreshment and joy. She had been brought up in a quiet country village; her mother had been in good service, and had taught Jane that honesty and modest behaviour are the things by which a girl makes herself respected. When her widowed mother died, Jane had come to her grandmother in London, with the idea of seeking a place. But she soon found that the grandmother needed her love and care, and that her old eyes were already growing dim for the

upholstery work by which she earned her bread. Jane had, therefore, resolved to stay with her; though the day was long with only a deaf old woman for company, and London was, oh! so hot and noisy! Jane could not but think at times how pleasant a nurse's place near the Parks would be. Still, she knew her duty, and she loved her grandmother and stayed with her.

At home, Jane had been apprenticed to a dress-maker, and now she found work in one of the shops in St. Paul's Churchyard. At first she went to sew there, but when her grandmother grew more infirm, her employers kindly gave her leave to take her work home. She missed the life and chatter of the work-room, but she was not as one of the girls there. They were so smart. Their talk was all of finery and gaieties, and more or less openly they quizzed her quiet dress, her simple turned-down hat. She wished at times to have a bit of finery, too; but she remembered that rent, and coals, and meat were dear, and that if she were smart, poor grandmother must go without her little comforts.

Jane was not a girl to make many friends; but one little friend she had who was far more deeply attached to her than she was aware of. This was the flower-girl on the other side of the road, and her love had been gained by the cheap coin of a kind word and a pleasant smile. That poor girl did not take up her post under the two

plane-trees till the day was far advanced ; she had to try to sell her flowers in the busier thoroughfares ; but when the gentlemen had all gone to business again after lunch, she would often—for the sake of hearing those few leaves rustle over her head—come and stand by the railings and dream herself (as I said) back in her Hampshire woods.

One day, when Jane was returning from the shop with a large parcel of work, the scent of the violets struck her, though they were no longer at their freshest, for a day's sun had shone upon them. She turned round as she was passing, and looked at the flowers, the little knots of rich deep colour in their few leaves. Then her eye travelled upwards to the girl's face, and she saw how pale and weary it was. It brightened at the sight of a possible customer.—

'Buy a bunch, miss?' she said ; 'sweet violets, a penny a bunch.' Jane bought a bunch, though pennies were not too plentiful with her, and the old grandmother asked, 'What she wanted with that rubbish?' The taste which she had learned in dressmaking, and which was natural to her besides, made her untie the poor little flowers, close-packed as they were in the shape of a cabbage, and smelling as strongly of bast as of violets, so much of that article was bound around them. She took a saucer and set them out in it as well as she could.

- 'How I wish I had some moss!' she said. 'At

home I used to pile up wet moss in a saucer, and stick the little spring flowers into it—snowdrops, or primroses, or even daisies and buttercups. It makes a room so cheerful when one comes in ; one's eye turns to the pretty little things at once.'

From that time she always noticed the flower-girl if she passed her in the street, and even nodded to her at times from her window when she stood opposite. It was partly a kindly feeling for the girl, partly old home love of the flowers. There was always a bright answering smile on the flower-girl's face ; a surprised, happy smile, as if frowns and hard words more commonly met her in the London streets.

One day Jane stopped : the basket was full of jonquils and wallflowers that day, and she said :—

'How pretty they are ! No, I cannot spare a penny to day. Why do you not mix up the flowers a little, and make pretty nosegays of them ?'

The girl stared.

'No one does,' she said : 'we haven't time ; we just sells them as they comes into market.'

'But you would sell them better if they looked prettier. One does not want all jonquils, nor all wallflowers. They would make such a pretty posy together, and you could make them go further.'

The girl shook her head.

'We haven't time,' she repeated, and the weary look came over her face.

'Do you have to be at the market very early?'

'By three o'clock in the morning, miss, or all the best flowers is gone.'

'You must be very tired at night?'

The girl sighed : a strange, wistful look came into her eyes as she turned them on her questioner. The soul of the girl was looking through those eyes, and it was a soul which had known many troubles, though but few years of life.

'You must be very tired,' said Jane.

'Heart-sick and footsore,' answered the girl, in a deep, strange tone.

Jane was so sorry for her, she would have said more ; but a passer-by cast his eye upon the basket, and the flower-girl darted up to him at once.

So time went on, and the two went their several ways, and saw one another seldom. Where the flower-girl lived, how she lived, nay, her very name, were all unknown to Jane. But she knew enough to make her pity the girl. She knew she was often 'heart-sick and footsore,' and that her young life had few or none even of the modest comforts which fell to her own share. She knew enough to make her pray for the girl. And what could she do more? What could any word or gift of hers do in comparison with the mighty power with which the Father of us all, the Father of both the girls, could bless them if so He willed it?

Jane prayed that the flower-girl might be helped,

and have rest and happiness. And the prayer was granted. Not in money, not in relief from her earthly toils, not in a change from her wretched lodging in a cellar with a sickly, repining mother, did the change come to this poor Hampshire maid, but in the sense that she was loved ; that some one in the wide world of London cared for her ; that a human heart beat in answer to her own.

For, one day, Jane passed her far enough from her little shelter under the plane-trees, and in answer to her welcoming smile said :—

‘Yes, I can buy a bunch to-day.’

They were roses now ; the girl eagerly picked out the best bunch for her.

Jane longed to tell the girl how she thought of her, yet a sort of shyness made her nervous.

‘I have not seen you down our street lately.’

‘No, I’ve found a better beat, miss, and I’m bound to do the best I can for me and mother. That’s the nicest bunch, miss ; have that one.’

‘Thank you ! Good-bye.’ And then the words came hurriedly : ‘I so often think of you ; I am so sorry for you ; I want to tell you that I pray for you very often.’

The strange look came on the girl’s face—almost a stupid look for a moment ; and then, as she understood that this other girl, with the pleasant face and good clothes, cared for her, prayed for *her*, poor ragged creature as she was, beggar as many

called her, a light broke all over her countenance as of sunshine.

‘Do you?’ she said. That was all. But *how* she said it! with what a tone of gratitude and affection!

The flower-girl’s ‘beat’ led her far away, and Jane and she did not meet again all that winter.

There came a time when all England was moved because her Prince was ill. Strangers meeting in the omnibus or train would ask each other with eager faces, ‘What news?’ And when they heard of the royal watchers, the tender wife and mother, a deep chord of love and loyalty was stirred, and the moist eyes of many an English woman, and English man too, told what their lips could not have spoken.

Then came the crisis, and then the relief, the hope, the blessed certainty of returning health; and at last a day was fixed on which the Prince would go to return thanks to God in St. Paul’s Cathedral. All the City made itself gay; it was to be a great day for rich and poor. The firm for whom Jane worked had reserved some windows for their own people, and Jane was to be among the rest to see the procession pass. She was delighted, but her thought was all of the great personages she would see, and of the happiness of mingling, as it were, her thanksgiving with theirs; until one day, when

Lydia Jennings, one of her former companions in the work-room came, as she sometimes did, for an hour's chat. She was a merry, good-natured, frivolous girl, and her present anticipations were less for the great sight than for the new blue dress she would wear, and the beautiful artificial rose, with three little beetles walking upon it, with which she meant to adorn her hat.

'And what shall you wear, Jane?' she asked, when these topics were exhausted.

'Wear?—I? Oh! I have never thought about it. I shall wear my Sunday dress, of course.'

'What! the little skimping grey?' asked Lydia, with evident disapproval. 'Well, perhaps the dress does not matter so much on a day like that, when we are all packed in our windows as tight as herrings in a barrel. But one must be smart about the head. Of course you will have a new hat?'

'Indeed I shall not. Neither the Queen nor the Prince will care much about my hat; and it is a very good one if they did. I damped and ironed the ribbon, and made it up with new velvet last week.'

'You are an odd girl, Jane. One doesn't wear one's hats just because they are *good*. The young men say you would be very nice-looking if you would dress like a Christian.'

Jane was but a girl, for all her steadiness, and

this bit of flattery had its effect. But she soon recovered. 'I cannot afford a new hat, Lydia; so don't tease me.'

'Well, now, I don't want to tease, but only to see you look nice. After all, a turn-down hat looks better on you than on most. But, you see, the shop young ladies will be there, and they are so grand we like to make ourselves smart too. Now, I'll tell you what; you will do very well if you will only have a bit of colour. A nice pink bow in your hair, and a tie to match. Pink will look so well on your brown plaits.'

Jane began to yield. 'How much will it cost?'

'Nice ribbed ribbon, a shilling a yard; not less than a yard and a half for a handsome bow (I will show you how to fringe the ends); and a tie, say one-and-eleven-pence halfpenny, or half-a-crown if you want the sweet new pink. Then a pair of light grey gloves, two shillings, or with double buttons, two-and-nine.'

Jane had been doing a sum while Lydia spoke. 'But, Lydia, that will cost as much as our rent and tea and sugar for a week.'

'Well, things cost money, but it is only once in a way, and a girl must look nice.'

'I will think about it,' answered Jane, quietly. And she did think. The idea of the pretty pink in her brown hair was pleasant; she would be glad to be rather more like the other girls. Perhaps she

could afford it this once. But two days before the procession her purchases were not made.

The grandmother spoke a great deal that evening about the grand sights she had seen—the Queen's coronation and her marriage, and how the streets were thronged. She complained, as old folks will, that she could not see the sight now; it was very hard to be tied to one room. But she would wear her best cap with the frills; Jane was to be sure to get it ready.

That night, the grandmother snoring peaceably at her side, Jane had a conflict with herself. Poor grandmother could not go out to see the sight; what pleasure would she have if Jane did not contrive it for her? And that poor old best cap, not worn for years, how faded its ribbons were! Hardly pink at all. How it would please grandmother if she found new pink bows in it as a surprise; and an egg and a rasher for tea would make it a nice treat for her; and all would cost less than Jane's finery. Yet the thought of her new tie was enticing. And who would see grandmother, or care whether her bows were faded? Suddenly the words of the young men came into her mind: 'She would be a nice-looking girl if she dressed like a Christian.' What was dressing like a Christian? Was it, could it be, dressing up in finery often unpaid for, or bought at the sacrifice of better things?

In the end the best cap was smart with new

bows ; the grandmother was as pleased as a child, and Jane went in her quiet greys and blacks to see the procession pass.

Early in the morning (for it was a general holiday), as Jane stood before her little glass, half vexed with her own homely appearance, half thankful that she had withstood temptation, the door-bell of the 'two-pair front' ringing its sharp little peal told her that some one was below, who had an errand to her grandmother or herself. She ran hastily down the steep and creaking stairs, and there, on the doorstep, stood Jane's old friend, the little flower-girl, eager but blushing, with her basket on her arm.

'Oh ! please excuse the liberty, miss,' she said hurriedly ; 'but I thought for sure you'd be going with all the rest of the folk to see the procession.'

'Yes, I am,' answered Jane ; 'our firm have kept us a window, and I am going at once. Shall you go, too ?'

'Oh ! I shall have a sight in the crowd, I dare say. But I thought you'd have a better sort of place somewheres, and I wanted you to have something to make you a bit smart, because of what you said, miss, that you thought of me and—and prayed for me, you know, miss. And I thought if you would accept this, and put it in your dress—I made so bold—I was first at the market to get you a nice flower : do take it, miss, do !'

From a safe corner of her basket she brought

forth one delicate little rose-bud, creamy white, with a nodding spray of fern beside it. Around it was a little circle of sweet violets.

‘How beautiful!’ cried Jane. ‘Did you say for *me*? But they are so choice! I am robbing you.’

‘Never mind that, miss,’ replied the eager girl, ‘so long as you likes them. I wanted to give you as good as there was in the market; and you told me to mix the flowers in bunches; and it was violets I was selling when I see’d you first. Thank you, miss, and good-bye.’

She had spoken rapidly; and now she was gone before Jane could answer a word.

That gift, with its sweet scent, its delicate beauty, was as a charm to preserve Jane’s mind from foolish shame at her own grave, simple attire, in strong contrast as it was with the smart dress of those around her. As she feasted her eyes on her flowers while she was, with the rest, awaiting the procession, the words of our Saviour came to her as if spoken in her ear: ‘Even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall He not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?’

But when the crowd began to surge and sway, and a distant roar heaved up, and people said, ‘They are coming!’ all else faded from her mind.

How grand it was ! The vast array of soldiers, with a dash of sunshine struck across the gleaming of their helmets ; the flags and garlands waving overhead ; and then the carriages and the faces of those whom all were there to see ! The country girl felt what life, true life, is ; it came upon her, as a flash of knowledge, that life is not an eager striving of each for his own miserable profit and pleasure, but a pouring out of love for others, a joy in the happiness of others, a sympathy with the many. This lesson was taught her by that mighty fact, the electric emotion of a great crowd. As hands waved a welcome, and every man's head was bared, there was a momentary silence which spoke, and which went up to God as a thank-offering.

That night, when the little homely feast was over, and grandmother—after telling many old stories, and joining a feeble, quavering voice in 'God save the Queen'—was sleeping peacefully, Jane had a strange dream, which seemed like a vision.

She thought she was standing on the ball above the dome of St. Paul's ; and in the clear night air she saw two forms near her, firm, though far above the earth. One was a great white angel with a sweet, solemn face. He held a pair of golden scales ; and Jane knew, as one knows in dreams, that he was trying the offerings which had that day been made to the Almighty. Beside him waited an

attendant angel with a censer, in which the offerings that were worthy and true were placed, to be carried before the Throne of God. The angel with the balance put out his hand, and took, as it were, from the air itself, the first offering—a human heart. Yes ; it was a true offering—the scale went down ; and as he laid it in the censer he said, ‘ The king shall rejoice in Thy strength, O Lord ; exceeding glad shall he be of Thy salvation.’

Gift after gift was tried. A heap of gold piled up the scale, and yet it rose as if a feather had been laid there, and the gold fell in a shower to the ground. It was the gift of pride, not of love. A penny which a child had given to a beggar was accepted. Prayers, which were but as a little vapour, could weigh down the scale as though they had been heaps of jewels. Others passed away like a breath, and were not.

When the censer was piled so full that Jane thought it could hold no more, the angel put out his hand again and took—what was it ?—a knot of pink ribbon ! He looked at her and smiled. She knew it well—the very ribbon she had pictured for herself ! She trembled to see it laid in the balance. Oh, she dared not offer such a trifle to her God ! But the angel threw in beside it a bunch of flowers—a tiny bunch, a rosebud and some violets ; but the perfume which instantly arose from them was more sweet, more penetrating, more delicate, than

any Jane had ever imagined. And those little gifts were good weight and true. Down, down sank the scale, and in her exceeding thankfulness Jane awoke, with these words on her lips :—‘ Inasmuch as ye did it unto the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me.’

A FAITHFUL SERVANT.

By M. E. TOWNSEND.

I.

‘ Oh ! the sunny morning ! ’

It was about ten o'clock on a summer morning, and the sun was shining brightly upon the old Manor House at Heathfield. A long, low house it was, standing not far from the road. The walls and the narrow French windows were festooned with creepers, monthly roses, Banksian roses, clematis, and the sweet chimonanthus, and many another besides ; while round the western corner of the house the Virginian creeper was making its way, and preparing for its gorgeous autumn glow. Folks said the garden had once been a pond ! Certainly it was pretty enough now, with shrubs, and winding walks, and bright little beds of flowers, that made you feel quite cheerful as you walked up the drive to the wide, open porch.

Under that porch a girl was now standing ; and a curious little figure enough she looked, if you had only seen her. On her head she wore something that was intended for a bonnet ; her dress was of

dark stuff, and rather short ; while from under her black, well-worn jacket, there hung down an apron much too large for its wearer, and evidently put on for the sake of dignity.

Presently the door of the Manor House opened slowly, and an elderly woman, with bright grey eyes, dark corkscrew curls, and a cap of much respectability, gazed wonderingly at the little person standing before her.

‘ Please, ‘m,’ said the girl, without further preamble, ‘ I want a place.’

‘ Well, child, and what of that ?’

‘ Please, ‘m, I heard as how you wanted a house-maid.’

‘ Mrs. Courtenay does, sure enough ; but what of that ?’

‘ Please, ‘m, mother said I might come and try ; and I can scrub the floors, and wash the dishes, and sweep, and I can bake, and mend stockings, and ——’ Here the little woman stopped for breath, exhausted with the long list of her accomplishments, and dimly conscious that the elderly housekeeper, with the bright grey eyes, and the black corkscrew curls, and the cap, was entirely disapproving of her.

‘ All I can say is, your mother must be a goose,’ quoth she. ‘ Why we want an up-grown woman for this house, and one who knows her work, too—not a chit of a child like you ! You just tell your

mother so, will you? And look here—next time you come, go round to the back-door. D'ye mind?'—

Poor Ruth Adams! she turned sorrowfully away, without another word. The sunshine and the flowers didn't look half so bright to her now as when she came up a few minutes ago, and as she walked down the approach the tears kept coming up into her eyes at the thought of her disappointment. But before she had reached the white gate she heard the housekeeper's voice calling to her again. She choked down her tears, and trotted back as fast as her legs would carry her.

'Look here, child, when we get the new housemaid you may come and learn, if you like, and if your mother likes to send you.'

'Thank you, ma'am,' said Ruth, in a subdued voice, and away she went again.

'Come and learn!' Here was another downfall for Ruth's pride. 'Come and learn of the new housemaid, indeed! What would mother say to that?'

But Ruth was a girl of pluck. Really, it was surprising the amount of spirit that was to be found in that small person. There was nothing she would not have have undertaken at fifteen, and if she could not gain her end in one fashion she would try to do so in another. All the way home those three words kept ringing in her ears—'Come and learn! Come and learn!' And by the time

she had reached her own door she found herself calculating how long it would be before the new housemaid could arrive at the Manor.

In the meantime the housekeeper looked into the dining-room, where sat Miss Courtenay, writing a letter.

'Ball,' said Miss Courtenay, 'who was that bright-looking girl that passed the window just now? I saw you call her back again. What did she come for?'

'Well, ma'am, it was Ruth Adams, from the post-office. Her mother must be a born idiot, that she must, to send that child here to try for the housemaid's place. I think I see her! But I told her, ma'am, when the new housemaid came, she might come and learn.'

Miss Courtenay looked aghast.

'But, Ball, my mother?'

'Jest you leave that to me, ma'am. I'll manage it.'

'I'm sure, Ball, you're quite welcome.' And the pale, gentle daughter of the house returned to her writing, while Mrs. Ball hurried away as fast as her dignity would let her, for she heard Mrs. Courtenay's bell resound in the distance.

Miss Courtenay was much more to be pitied than Ruth Adams. Ah! what a life she led! Her mother was a fretful, selfish invalid, who fancied she had every disease under the sun; but whose real malady lay chiefly in the fact that she cared for

nobody but herself, and thought of nothing but her own ailments. Miss Courtenay's only brother, whom she adored, was far away in India : it was to him she was now writing. She was quite five-and-thirty, but had no more freedom than if she had been thirteen, and from one day to another she never knew what was going to happen. Mrs. Courtenay might take it into her head that she needed change of air, and then would commence those weary travels from one watering-place to another, from lodgings to hotels and from hotels to lodgings, with which the dull monotony of life at Heathfield was alone diversified. Then there were anxieties about money ; for Mrs. Courtenay's income was a small one. When her husband died, he had left her the Manor House for her life, and scarcely enough money to live in it with comfort. As for her, however, she expected to have everything she wanted ; and, as far as it was possible, she had it. But all the burden fell upon her daughter ; and it was no wonder, indeed, that with all this Miss Courtenay was pale, and worn, and nervous. She always looked as if her body and soul had both been put into a vice, and as if neither could move in comfort. If she had not been a true and earnest Christian, I do not think she could have borne her fretting, harassing life ; but—she had her reward. No one ever missed it yet, who did their duty bravely and lovingly, as she did hers—for the Master's sake.

II.

'Who sweeps a room as to Thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.'

THE new housemaid arrived in due time. Mrs. Adams was a wise woman in her generation, and, as she expressed it herself, she knew very well which way her bread was buttered ; so she made no sort of objection to the housekeeper's proposal, and Ruth did come and learn ; and when she learnt, it was with a will. She was fortunate, too, in her teacher.

Alice the housemaid was a bright, cheery young woman, and quite ready to give the younger maiden a helping hand in this her first step up the ladder of knowledge. Happily, too, Alice was one of those who had been trained to put common sense into her work, instead of doing it like a machine. She really did sweep her carpets in good, old-fashioned style, with well-washed tea-leaves ; and could lay a fire so that when it was lit it would burn up at once, instead of going out just when it was most wanted ! As to the bees'-waxed floors at the Manor, they became a wonder to see, for Alice took a pride in them. And last, not least, she always 'swept under the mats ;' for she was a conscientious girl, and would have scorned to clean the outside and leave the inside dirty. But then, Alice had been early

taught that every little duty—aye, even what too many would call ‘common’ household work—may be done to the glory of our Master in heaven, and that *He* sees whether we have done it rightly, honestly, and ‘our very best,’ even if no one else does.

A great thing, indeed, it was for the young Ruth that she had come to so good a school. And Alice the housemaid was not her only teacher. Miss Courtenay would help her with her reading and writing whenever she had time: she taught her, too, how to read and study her Bible; and, more than all, she showed to the young, eager girl, what a blessed thing it is to have the love of Christ in the heart. Ruth was quick enough to see that Miss Courtenay led a weary, troubled life; but every now and then she seemed to catch a glimpse of the real true peace and joy within, that made up for it all. Ruth could not feel the same as yet; but God was beginning to teach her by Miss Courtenay’s quiet, humble example, which was better than many sermons.

From that first summer morning when Ruth Adams had passed the dining-room window, as she trotted down the approach, Miss Courtenay had taken a fancy to her; and as time went on this fancy increased, till there grew up between the two—between the sad, timid daughter of the house, and the young, bright maid—a mutual liking that

was very much akin to love. Of course it was partly because Ruth *was* so young and bright that Miss Courtenay liked her; but she felt, also, the worth of her warm, faithful heart; and then, as I have said before, Ruth had 'a spirit of her own;' so that Miss Courtenay, quite insensibly to herself, saddened and crushed as she had been by care, began almost to lean upon the girl, who was so fearless and so strong.

Thus the days went on, and Ruth was growing up into a woman; and she still went continually to work at the Manor, for I don't think any of its inmates would have liked to do without her.

If you had seen Ruth at eighteen, I think you would have said she was pretty; and yet her features were by no means regular: but the beautiful grey eyes with their long, dark lashes; the jet black hair and rosy cheeks; and, above all, the pleasant, frank expression of the whole countenance, made one forget everything else. Ruth got plenty of admiration; but somehow she never seemed to care much about it, and always declared she should die an 'old maid.' As for Alice, she had no mind for any such thing; and in course of time it became known that she was about to leave her service at the Manor for a comfortable home of her own. Her betrothed was a young man in very good business in the neighbourhood, much respected by all who knew him; and, of course, he

and Alice thought each other the most perfect, as well as the happiest, people in the world. . . . But, in the meantime, the Courtenays must have a housemaid ; and what was to be done ?

‘Well, mum,’ said the worthy Ball, when this question was propounded to her by Miss Courtenay, ‘I’m thinking we needn’t look so very far a-field before we find one. Why not Ruth Adams, as well as another ? She knows pretty well as much as Alice can teach her ; and what she doesn’t know I can show her. ’Twould be better than having a stranger ; ’cause you see, mum, she knows the ways of the house, like.’

‘Well, Ball, of course I’ve no objection,’ said Miss Courtenay ; ‘but I don’t know about my mother.’

‘Jest you leave it to me, mum ; I’ll manage it.’ And manage it she did.

It was a proud day for Ruth Adams when she went home and told her mother that, with her consent, she was going to be housemaid at the Manor. Mrs. Adams did consent ; and Ruth soon found herself filling, to the best of her power, Alice’s empty place.

It was hard at first. Ruth had to plan her own work now, and manage it as best she could, instead of merely doing what she was told, and filling up the gaps for other people. The girl who had been chosen to help her was not very bright either ;

though, I am bound to say, Ruth tried to be patient with her and help her on, as she had been helped herself. It was not natural to Ruth to be patient: she had her faults like the rest of us—and a 'strong temper' was one of them; but her moments of passion were short and soon over, and Miss Courtenay's gentle patience was helping her to overcome them. But I think Ruth's worst fault was, that she could not bear to be told when she had done wrong, or failed in anything. Perhaps this was partly from her intense desire to do her best and succeed in what she undertook, and from a certain sensitiveness of heart which made her very mindful of the opinion of others. Anyway, this failing was always a great hindrance to her, hard as she tried, and long as she struggled, to overcome it.

Still, with all her faults, Ruth was a true help to Miss Courtenay at this time, and sorely she needed it. Many a weary hour of nursing fell to her lot during the next few years; for Mrs. Courtenay's imaginary ailments were becoming real ones, and by degrees she completely lost her sight. Happily, her fretfulness grew less as her maladies increased. Ruth could soothe her at any time by singing hymns to her; and it seemed, at last, as if the sweet, holy words she sang woke an echo in the dull, aged heart that had so long been closed to such influences. . . . And then, just as

Miss Courtenay was beginning to reap the blessing of her dutiful attendance on her mother, she was taken from her !

With the loss of her mother came, also, the loss of her home ; for the Manor House had been left to Mrs. Courtenay by her husband only for her life. After her death it was to be sold ; and Miss Courtenay, with her small income and smaller knowledge of the world, was obliged to seek another abode.

Ball the housekeeper, who had once reigned supreme over the household, was becoming infirm, and would retire with dignity to a home of her own, where she would be bored to death with 'nothing to do.'

There was only Ruth to follow her mistress's fortunes ; she was promoted to be lady's-maid, and with her parents' consent she left her native village with Miss Courtenay, and a few weeks more found them settled in a new home—a snug cottage in one of the warm, bright watering-places on the coast of Devonshire.

Miss Courtenay was led to settle at S—— because Lady Malcolm, a friend of her youth, had a house in the near neighbourhood thereof. Poor Miss Courtenay had had a romance in her life, like other people, for all that she looked so faded and so quiet now. As a girl, she had been deeply attached to Sir Archibald Malcolm ; but family

circumstances, want of money, and, above all, her mother's selfishness, had caused the engagement to be broken off. Miss Courtenay remained a spinster, and Sir Archibald married her friend, Ellen Stanhope. This made no difference in her friendship for the latter, on the contrary—though even to *her* gentle nature the struggle was a little hard at first—she learned to rejoice in the happiness of the two beings whom she loved with a pure and unselfish affection.

Now, alas ! Sir Archibald had been called away, and Lady Malcolm was left a widow, with three fine, spirited boys.

It was many a long year since the friends had met, and it was with the hope of seeing much of Lady Malcolm that Miss Courtenay established herself at S—.

III.

'Never so safe as when our will
Yields undiscerned by all but God.'

It was again a bright summer morning, and the garden in front of Miss Courtenay's tiny cottage was gay with flowers. She did not think them so bright, somehow, as her old favourites at Heathfield, and the air did not feel to her so fresh and

bracing. Now that the old life lay behind her she forgot its weariness, and remembered only the pang of leaving the one home she had ever known.

Ruth was a little homesick too, if the truth must be told ; she felt a bit down-hearted in this strange place, with the great wide sea—which she had never seen before—so close upon her, ebbing and flowing for ever with such a ceaseless, wearying motion. She was busy with some sewing on this sunny morning—and her thoughts were busy, too—when suddenly she heard steps upon the gravel outside, and then a ring at the bell.

Things were not in order yet at the cottage ; the parlour-maid had not come ; so Ruth went to open the door, and there, behold ! was a fine little fellow of about nine summers, mounted on a rough, skittish Shetland pony, with a man-servant in attendance. The visitor announced himself as Rory Malcolm, come to see Miss Courtenay and to show her his pony. The servant also produced a note from Lady Malcolm, who had arrived at S—— only the day before.

Miss Courtenay was soon at the door, admiring the pony to the heart's content of its little rider, while all the time her heart was throbbing and her cheek flushing, as she seemed to see those eyes that she had loved so well in the days gone by, looking at her again from the sweet, boyish face before her.

As for Ruth, she was so taken up with the child and the pony and her mistress's excitement, that she scarcely noticed 'John,' the man-servant, who was holding the pony with becoming gravity the whole time; but though she took no notice of him he took notice of her, and as he walked home with his little charge he said to himself, 'If ever I marry that's the sort of girl I should like for my wife.' Certainly Ruth did look very pretty and loveable on that morning, in her trim black dress, and neat white collar and cuffs, her dark shining hair twisted in simple coils round her shapely head, and her eyes looking so deep and earnest beneath their long lashes. John could not help noticing her sweet ways with the child and with her mistress; and in the weeks and months that followed, when the communication between the two houses became continual, he had many opportunities of seeing more of Ruth, and confirming his first opinion of her. Also it came to pass that in time she learnt to take a little notice of *him*. Ruth had never cared for any one before as now she cared for John Sandford. Somehow, he had contrived to steal her heart before she was aware of it! He was a good bit older than her, and a steady, rather grave-looking man; yet he had a pleasant way with him. Any one who was accustomed to read faces like a book would have told you at once by the look of his mouth that his

character was somewhat weak and unstable ; but Ruth only read his face by the light of her love, and she never found it out. Besides, there was so much that was good about John. He was a trustworthy servant ; and really tried to do his duty and serve God as well as he knew, and he was always ready to listen to Ruth when she talked seriously to him, which she sometimes did. For God was teaching her day by day to love and serve Him better in her daily life, and should she not help on the one she loved to do the same, as well as she could ?

So that summer passed, till, in the late autumn, Lady Malcolm was obliged to go abroad for her health, and before John and Ruth parted, she had promised to be his wife—‘one of these days, *when she could leave Miss Courtenay.*’

All this time Ruth had never breathed a word to her mistress. The wooing had been done very quietly, for Ruth’s was a shy nature ; and really I think she was wonderfully astonished at herself for caring about John at all—she, who had always determined to be ‘an old maid.’ But it was from no unworthy feeling of shame that she did not tell Miss Courtenay. No ! Brave, pure-minded woman that she was, she knew that there was nothing to be ashamed of in an honest love ; but she knew, too, that she could not, and would not, leave her mistress : she knew how Miss Courtenay depended

upon her, she knew that she was lonely and had but few friends, and yet that in her unselfishness she would want her to 'go and be happy.'

Ruth would have liked to tell her, and she would have liked to look forward to a home of her own some day; but she had a kind of feeling all the time that it would never be, and now—John was gone! Perhaps they might not meet again for some time, and she would not disturb Miss Courtenay's peace of mind just as she had settled herself in her haven of rest.

And the weeks became months, and the months, years. Yes, it was five years before Lady Malcolm was able to return again to S—, and then it was only for a short time. John Sandford was still in her service, and Ruth looked forward to the meeting with mingled joy and fear. They had written to each other, of course, but what is writing compared with speaking face to face?

When the meeting was over, and the Malcolms had departed again, Ruth asked herself if she were happy; and her heart was sorely puzzled to give the answer. John seemed as fond of her as ever—that he did—and yet, what was it? There was a shade of difference somehow that Ruth could not account for. Was it in herself, or in him? He had urged her to fix a time for their marriage, and when she still said she could not bear to leave Miss Courtenay, and pleaded for a little longer delay,

his manner had betrayed a touch of petulant bitterness which she had never seen in him before, and which startled her for a moment. Then she remembered it was but natural, for of course he could not enter into her feelings for her mistress. She would wait and watch, and see how things turned out.

Another year passed, and then Ruth heard rumours—for 'ill news ever flies apace'—that John Sandford was making up to some one else; or, perhaps, some one else was making up to him. Any way, he wrote a strong letter to Ruth, intimating that he could not wait for ever, he was getting to be a middle-aged man, and he wanted a wife to make him a home. It was very plain from the letter that he still cared for Ruth, that he wanted her most of all; yet its tone said plainly enough, 'If you won't marry me now, out of hand, some one else will.'

Poor Ruth, it was a hard time for her when that letter came. She felt as if duty called her both ways. For still she could not bring herself to leave Miss Courtenay, and yet she had given her promise to John to be his wife 'one of these days.' She felt that even now his old love would return if she married him; she was sure he would make her a good husband; and it was still a pleasant thought to her that she might have a home of her own and some one to care for her all her life. Full

well she knew that if she could have made up her mind to leave Miss Courtenay, she might, long ere now, have been a happy wife.

But then, on the other hand, remembering what she had heard, she felt that John did not need her now so much as did her mistress; he was evidently able to do without her, and there was a natural pang of jealousy and wounded pride as she thought of that other unknown one, whom she was sure John would marry if she refused him. But those were not the chief feelings that filled her heart. Her mistress was getting into years, her health was beginning to fail her. No, she could not, would not leave her; she would stay by her to the end and be an 'old maid' after all, as she had always prophesied of herself. It was a hard battle, but Ruth won it!

John would not wait. He married Lady Malcolm's maid before many weeks were out. Miss Courtenay had forgotten his very existence, and much she wondered, and often she racked her brains, to discover the cause of Ruth's pale looks. But Ruth kept her secret well; Miss Courtenay should never guess the sacrifice she had made; it would have distressed her kind heart beyond measure. Day by day Ruth was becoming more necessary to Miss Courtenay, day by day she tended her more affectionately. Just about this time she was seized with a dangerous illness, and in the

silent hours of nursing, Ruth had leisure to think of the future, and to realise for the first time that perhaps she had thrown away her chance of earthly happiness for nothing—Miss Courtenay might die, and she would be left without a friend.

Still she did not repent of what she had done. She had acted all through with prayer for God's holy guidance. Unlike too many girls, she had felt that such a serious matter as marriage was indeed one that she might make a subject of prayer. She had honestly tried to follow the right path, the path of duty, and though her heart was often heavy for a while, yet God gave her peace—as He ever does to those who give up self, and their own wills, at His bidding. And when Miss Courtenay recovered, Ruth could almost forget her own trouble in the joy of that restoration, to which, with God's blessing, her careful nursing had so largely contributed.

IV.

Home to the angel land,
Home where no shadows fall,
Home to the golden strand,
Home to the Monarch's hall,
Home from all risk of harm,
Home to the land of rest,
Home to my FATHER'S arm,
Home to my SAVIOUR'S breast.

NEARLY twenty years have passed away since Ruth Adams made that decision not to leave her mistress. Quiet years they have been, and broken by few events. To Miss Courtenay they have brought one great sorrow—the death of her idolized brother shortly after his return from India : she has much anxiety, too, about her friend Lady Malcolm, whose life, so precious to her boys, is a sadly precarious one. Miss Courtenay herself is now an old woman, and very feeble. All this time she and Ruth have gone on living together at S——, in the tiny cottage by the shore of the sounding sea ; the illness we spoke of in our last chapter was only the first of many such attacks, which gradually undermined the little strength she had, leaving her at last almost as helpless as a child. On Ruth she depended for everything. It was Ruth who kept her house, managed her affairs, read to her, sang to her, soothed and cheered her through the

long weary days. Poor old Miss Courtenay! she lived in the light of Ruth's cheery smile. What would she have done without her faithful maid?

John Sandford was not the only man who had tried to tempt Ruth away by the offer of a happy home and a husband's love. But she had refused them all. 'Surely,' she thought, 'God will let me be with my mistress now to the end?'

But God's ways are not as our ways, and He saw fit that it should be otherwise. For some months past Ruth's strength had suddenly and unaccountably failed. The doctors could not explain it; but at length it became evident that an insidious disease had laid hold upon her, and that it was one that admitted of no cure.

Bravely and patiently the faithful creature continued at her post, as long as ever she could, till at length she was forced to ask for the help of her widowed sister, who would gladly come to wait on Miss Courtenay in her stead.

Then, when the strain was over, and she could allow herself to rest, she grew worse. All who saw her, saw also that death was written in her face, and that the noble, self-forgetting life would soon be over.

But who can describe Ruth's grief when she could no longer nurse and tend her beloved mistress and friend? Soon she became so weak that she could scarcely speak to her. 'But, oh,'

she said, 'if I may but see her—that is enough !' And she would sit and look at her, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes—and with all her soul's affection in that sad pathetic gaze—a hungry gaze, as if she felt how soon the beloved one would be withdrawn from her.

It was too much for Miss Courtenay at last, in her enfeebled state ; and after one most touching interview, Ruth, unselfish to the end, declared that this must not be again. She would see her no more, but she would write a farewell letter to her whom she had loved so well ; a simple letter it was, and short, yet I think few could have read it without tears.

After this last effort Ruth gradually faded away. She pined for the presence in which she had always lived. Now there was nothing more to live for ; and she cared no longer to keep her malady at bay, as she had done before, by the sheer force of her courageous spirit.

Many friends visited her in her illness. Many a sick one, to whom she had brought sunshine during life, prayed for her from the couch of pain. Doctor and clergyman came and went and marvelled, day by day, at her quiet fortitude, her deep and fervent faith. Ruth was never a great talker—it was not in her nature to speak much of her feelings, but all who saw her felt that her Saviour was very near her. God had been teaching her and leading

her step by step, all her life through; and her heart went up to Him reverently and silently with a humble, childlike devotion.

It so happened that chance brought John Sandford to S—— just at this time, and he asked to see Ruth, but she refused. She had put away the things of earth, she said; and though she felt nothing but good-will towards him, she would not disturb her mind by seeing him.

Ruth's parents had long since passed away; her brothers were married and settled in distant counties. Her widowed sister tended her with unwearying love, and there was a deep attachment between the two; but Ruth's chief earthly thought was for her mistress, even to the end.

'Tell her,' she said, when the last hour was drawing very near, and a sweet, bright smile, lighted up her poor thin face as she spoke—'Tell her that she will not be long after me, and that I shall be waiting for her with open arms.' And again—'Tell her how I have loved her, and that I shall love her for ever.'

At last the weary struggle between life and death was over. The faithful life had been lived, and the faithful heart was at rest for evermore.

* * * *

Ruth's prediction was accomplished. Miss Courtenay did not long survive her. Ruth had

made the only brightness of her declining years, and she could not do without her.

Mistress and maid sleep side by side now in the green churchyard at S——, where the sun smiles so brightly on the peaceful graves and on the flowers that spring up around them, while the waves murmur sweet lullabys in the distance, on the quiet shore. On each stone that guards the rest of those two, so dear to each other in life, are engraved the words,—

‘ONE IS THEIR MASTER, EVEN CHRIST.’

THE STORY OF A CAT.

Briga, January, 187—.

‘WHY doesn’t that cat write its life?’ These words have been ringing in my ears for a long time past. I hear them when I sit purring over the fire. But then I am too comfortable to think; and when I am busy looking for birds and mice it is quite impossible to give the time for it. But just now the snow is on the ground, so cold and deep that I can’t set my paw out; and as this gives me idle time, I will attend to these words, and write down what I can remember of my past life.

Ah me! the days are gone when I used to lie on velvet gowns and silken aprons, and play un-reproved with golden chains! But, after all, there are kind hearts under cotton gowns, and, when one gets used to them, the laps are almost as comfortable whether they are of stuff or silk.

But to begin my life. I think I had been in the world about fifteen days when one little corner of my right eye began to open. How I stretched it

to try and see all I could ! for I was born, as my dear master used often to remark, 'the most curious cat in the world.' I couldn't see much, for my mother seemed a large mountain of fur whichever way I looked. By the end of that first memorable day my eye, by dint of stretching it, was nearly all open, and I had just gone to sleep, tired out with staring about, when I was rudely seized by the nape of my neck, and a monster roared in my ear, 'Why, it has opened one eye ! it will soon be fit to give away.' What that meant I didn't know, and very nearly never found out ; for a monstrous dog, for whom I had inherited a mortal fear from my mother, came and took me in his mouth. I quite thought I was dead ; but the monster roared, and, catching me up, popped me down again beside my mother, who, poor dear ! was all in a tremble, and licked me to that degree that I nearly fell out of the basket. After this I very soon got the sight of both my eyes, and began to play with my mother's tail, much to her delight. I had a brother and a sister, and great fun we had in our basket together. My grandmother sometimes looked in ; but she was a large, grave tabby, and had forgotten how to play, so that I did not much care for her. The monster who had been so rough to me was, I found, our master, and in spite of his loud voice, my mother was fond, and not at all afraid, of him ; indeed our mistress was

more to be feared, for she could give one a great hard cuff. But then she had a great deal to do, and didn't like me to clamber into the pots, which was my greatest pleasure; whereas our master hadn't anything to do, that I could find out. He wore a smart green coat piped with red, and went out every morning very early with an empty leathern bag on his back, and returned with it still empty at night. Of course I wanted to know if there was anything inside, and, in spite of my mother's warnings, managed to creep into it one morning, and he never found me out until he had got the bag on his back, and then how he did roar! But he only gave me a kiss and put me on the floor. So I grew a little bolder, and even ventured to play with the dog's tail now and then. But those days soon came to an end. I was playing one day with my brother and sister when a woman came into the cottage, and, before I knew anything, I found myself snapped up and carried away. I could not see where I was going, and cried with all my might; but she jogged on, only giving me a slap now and then through the apron. At last she opened it, and put me down on some very dirty bricks in a very dirty cottage. There was no fire, and there were no comfortable things, as in my mother's home. Two grimy children seized hold of me immediately, pulling my tail and ears, and hurting me very much. I was extremely un-

happy, and determined to run home as soon as I could ; but for some days I never had the chance ; those horrible children never left me alone except at night, and then the door was shut. They gave me nothing to eat, as their mother said I was to catch mice, and I had no idea then what they were ; I rather thought they might be flies, which were all I lived upon. At night I sat amongst the ashes. Indeed I had a terrible time of it. I don't know how long this lasted ; but one day, to my great joy, my little tormentors went away and left the door open. I ran out as fast as I could ; but I was dreadfully frightened when I found myself in the wide world all alone. I encountered fearful sights and sounds ; men and dogs passed, and I hid myself behind bushes ; leaves rustled, and made me put up my back with terror : still on I ran, believing I must at last reach my mother's home. I did not know then that there are more roads in the world than one.

At last I arrived at the top of a hill, and saw before me two houses, bigger than any I had ever seen before. I ran to the first, and found the door open ; so in I went and mewed : but there was nobody there but an old white horse. I asked him to let me stay, but he said the house was not his own, and so he could not give me leave to remain. I was getting very tired and so hungry that I longed even for a fly ; but there was nothing

there but hay and leather: so I went on again, past a pretty little fountain, to a tall white house with a big fir-tree shading it. To my great joy the door stood open. I was really too hungry to be frightened, but went up the steps into the hall, and finding no one there mewed with all my might. One thing rather alarmed me. There hung on a peg what looked like the skin of a large cat. 'Supposing they kill and eat cats here!' I thought; but I still mewed, and suddenly a door opened and I heard a voice exclaim, 'Dear! how very odd! Law, a kitten!' And before I had time to see anything, I was picked up to a great height and well scrutinised all over by two eyes, one grey, one brown. By degrees I looked to see who or what had taken me up. It was a dear, kind-faced creature, of the same species as my old master, only much taller, and with a longer nose. I was not at all frightened, he held me so comfortably; and, taking me into a room, he called 'Marie!' and asked for some milk. How I drank! I drank till this good man laughed, and called me a little barrel. Just as I had finished and was shrinking away under a chair—for I began to feel a little shy—some one else came in. I had never seen such a glorious being! She had on a coat something like mine—only black, and a bit out of the sky put on in front. When she saw me she exclaimed,

‘What have you got, Fritz?’ and looked at me with something like horror.

‘A poor little half-starved kitten, my love. I have just given it some milk, and will now put it out in the sun, and no doubt it will run home.’

I trembled with fear; but he took me up, and, giving me a kiss, dirty as I was, he opened the door and placed me gently in the sunshine. I looked round in despair. No, I could not bear it! I bounded up the steps again, ran to the glorious being, and placing myself before her, I implored her with all my eloquence to let me stay. There was by this time some one else in the room, who exclaimed, ‘O you poor little starved misery!’ The words were not flattering, but the tone was kind, and I found myself placed on that blue lap, whilst the glorious being exclaimed, ‘No, you poor little cat! you shan’t be turned out; you shall stay with us.’

This was a wonderful and never-to-be-forgotten moment in my life. The dear, kind creature, whom I must now call my master, came back, and he too said I should never go away; and they two and the other being (I must call her my aunt, to distinguish her) stroked me and wondered where I came from, and how I could ever have got so dirty and thin. Ah, if they had lived on flies, and slept in the grate, they too would have been dirty

and thin ! I was quite unconscious, before, that I was dirty. At home my mother had always washed me ; after that, everybody and thing I saw was grimy ; but now I found it was considered quite a disgrace to have a black nose, such as mine was. Indeed it distressed my master so much that he set about cleaning it. I had no notion how to do it myself, so he rubbed it with butter every morning, which I licked off directly ; and somehow, in the course of a few days, everybody began to say that I had a nice little pink nose. I wanted very much to see it, but that was impossible.

And now began the happiest days of my life. I had been so teased and starved that when I first arrived I had quite forgotten how to play or to purr ; but I very soon recovered myself, and fine fun I had. Everybody petted me, and let me do exactly as I pleased. In the kitchen they adored me. Naughty or good, Marie loved me ; although I have a dim recollection of stealing and eating a sweetbread from the cellar, and being terribly punished. The two maids, Emma and Alice, let me play with all their things, and I soon learnt to take out reels and tapes and cottons, and scatter them all over the floor. They gave me playthings, and made a little bag to hold them, which they hung round my neck. But this I didn't much like, especially as I was taken into the dining-room to be seen, and they all three laughed at me. But

of all my pleasures none was so great as that of being with my master, and helping him with his studies. I believe I was of great use, and perhaps some of my discoveries may be published in a book ; for he was a very clever man, and wrote a great deal. In fact, fond as I was of everybody in the house, no one was to me like my master. In the first place, it was he who had taken me in, and saved me from starvation ; so that gratitude bound me to him ; and then we had much the same tastes. I would watch a fly for an hour on the window-pane, and he would look at a flower for as long ; and in this I always helped him, smelling the flower whilst he looked at it, and rubbing my tail against it. I soon learnt, too, to take off his spectacles ; and this was, I feel sure, a great assistance. My mistress and my aunt used to laugh in fits when I did it ; they could not do it at all. Then, although I could not write, I always laid myself down on the paper whilst my master was writing, and he was so pleased, I feel sure it helped him very much. I mostly spent my evenings on the drawing-room table, putting things to rights, eating pens, and smelling the flowers. Indeed I was so fond of them, that my aunt said I had the spirit of Linnæus in my body. Who he was I never could discover. Generally of an evening my master would bring in a long tin box, the very sound of which used to wake me up with

delight, and we studied its contents together. All sorts of pretty flowers and plants used to come tumbling out of it, every one of which I smelt, and often taking one up in my mouth would run off with it under the table. My mistress sometimes found fault, but my dear master never; he let me have what I liked, and I have even known him go without a book he particularly wanted all the evening because I was sitting upon it. At one time I had a lamb's tail given me, which I threw up and caught in my paws, and played with so gracefully, that all my three admirers would laugh till they almost cried, and say I must be half a squirrel. In the morning, when my master and I had finished breakfast—for he and I only were down so early—I honoured my mistress or my aunt occasionally by going to their rooms before they were up; but usually my master and I went to our studies immediately. We had a studio to ourselves, and he would sit for hours silently looking through a microscope, whilst I sat by and purred or handled the flowers, or patted his nose, which was one of my favourite playthings. I didn't care very often to go into dinner, because my master couldn't carve if I sat in front of the meat, as I liked, and my aunt wouldn't let me come on the table; but sometimes, when my master had been out all day and I heard them all laugh very much, I went in to listen.

Here I must not forget to relate a curious part of my history. I had not been many days in the house before it so happened that I was in the kitchen when the letters came, and who should bring them in that very bag which I thought was always empty, but my old master in his green coat piped with red ! How he roared when he saw me ! and I was terrified lest he should take me back to that dreadful cottage and the dirty children. But he had no such intention, and I feel sure my master and mistress, my aunt, Emma, Alice, and Marie, would never have allowed it. There, too, was the dog with whose tail I used to play. Both admired me, and Mr. Postman and Marie talked a great deal about me, during which time I assumed all the dignity I could and walked into the dining-room, lest any harm should befall me.


All this time I was very anxious to see myself ; I had seen every one else in the house, and it seemed very hard and strange I should only be debarred from seeing myself. I heard all sorts of observations made, and could never tell if they were true or not. As for my master, he thought me beautiful, I know, from the end of my buttered pink nose to the tip of my tail. My mistress said she did not know much of cats, but thought I was a beauty. It was my aunt who checked my vanity, by always putting in some observation of this kind : ' Oh you ugly little cat ! why don't you wash your-

self better? Smutty little wretch! what a tail! I would be ashamed to have such a thing! Why, you can't curl it round your feet! Your nose is too long, and your coat very bad! Your eyes are your only beauty!' How I did long to see them!

One evening, when wandering about for amusement, I took a tremendous spring from my master's lap on to the chimney-piece, and there, full in front of me, what should I see but a cat? and a very pretty cat, too, in spite of my aunt's opinion. All white like velvet, with here and there a dark mark upon me. A pale face, certainly, but with two large, brilliant, expressive eyes in it. How I saw myself I don't know to this day; but sometimes it so happens that one does see oneself in the furniture. I thought certainly that my coat was not quite so clean as it might have been, and from this time forth took more pains with, and pride in it; and I may now say, there isn't a cat in the whole of Briga with a coat as well kept as mine. I find society here very oppressive and dull; for my early life was spent where all my talents were appreciated and brought forward; and all day I heard myself called a clever cat. Here no one knows a clever cat from a stupid one. I was generally called for when visitors came, and my history told; though, in truth, it has never been correctly narrated until now. I remember the first time I ever heard of

Briga was from an acquaintance of my master's, who came to dine with us.

'In Briga,' he related, 'once lived a boy whose ambition was to rise in life, and who wished, by way of beginning, to become a soldier. His mother opposed his wish, so one day he said to her, "Mother, I always keep my word, don't I?" "Yes," she answered; "you are a good boy, and always do what you say you will." "Very well," replied he; "then if you don't let me be a soldier I will burn the house down." After a while his mother, finding his heart so set on the matter, let him have his way, and he became a soldier; and, rising rapidly by good conduct, he was before long a sergeant. He then wished to belong to the police force; and this, too, he obtained. He was then stationed at a small village in Piedmont, the curé of which was a good and kind man, and one to whom the poor committed their savings weekly or monthly; and thus, at times, he had a good deal of money in his possession. A band of noted brigands haunted the country at this time, and somehow Régard—that was the name of the young policeman—got scent of a plot to rob and murder the curé. His servant was in love with a man who was in league with the brigands, and was going to betray her master into their hands. Régard accused her of the conspiracy, and told her he knew such things of her lover as would condemn him to prison,



and that he would reveal them unless she confessed the whole plot to him, and did exactly as he should tell her. Thus urged, she told him how the brigands intended one evening to enter the house, and, creeping upstairs, to plunge a dagger into the curé's heart, who at that hour would be reading by his lamp. There would be seven brigands. On this information Régard hastened to Turin, and informed the head of the police of the plot, saying at the same time that as he had discovered it he hoped to be allowed to conduct the affair in his own way. His request was granted, and he returned to the village accompanied only by one policeman. On the evening when the robbery was to be effected he locked the servant in her room, opened the doors, and placed a screen behind the curé, who was to read as usual by his lamp. In the screen he made a hole through which he could see, and at which he could place a pistol. The other policeman was in an adjoining room leading on to the staircase. The curé was a brave man, and he sat reading and awaiting his murderers quite calmly. At last a sound was heard, and a step on the staircase. The curé remained absorbed in his book. The first brigand entered, and quietly approached the curé, who never raised his eyes from his book. Just as he was close to him, and his dagger raised, a shot passed through his head, and he dropped down dead. Another brigand entering, he too fell, and

so with several others. The policeman concealed in the other room did his part also, and in a few minutes two men only remained. These fled to the garden; but every outlet was closed, and they were soon secured. Such an act of prowess obtained for Régard his promotion, and he became sergeant of police.' My master's friend professed to have seen and conversed with him as an old man. He told other stories, too; but I really must get on with my own.

Somewhere about this time I nearly lost my life in a very horrible manner. A friend of my aunt's came to dinner; he was a tall, bright-faced man, very full of fun, and we had all laughed much with him. After dinner I thought I would see a little more what he was like, and so got on the sofa near him. Suddenly he leaned back, and had not my aunt exclaimed, 'Oh, you are sitting on the cat!' I should certainly have been crushed to death. All seemed to think this very amusing, and laughed more than ever; so I graciously forgave him, and as he stroked me kindly, I remained near him for the rest of the evening.

Soon after this came a time in my life to which I always look back with regret. It was very bad, wet weather, and I took it into my head to like scampering about all day in the rain, and coming in wet through. This distressed everybody exceedingly; Marie nearly cried over the state of my coat,

especially when I had been out all night and only returned in the morning. I found a queer little hole in the rock at the bottom of the garden, and there—I really can't now imagine why—I preferred spending my nights; and I often heard all the household calling me, and only listened, turned round, and went to sleep again.

Marie was under the impression that I caught birds and mice, and I laughed in my sleeve (this is a human being's expression, and a very stupid one, for I never saw anybody laugh in their sleeve when they said they did), as I knew I had never caught anything bigger than a grasshopper. However, I did the nearest thing I could to catching them, for I scrambled up every tree in the place. I remember one day it was pouring with rain, which ran in muddy streams down the gutter and hid the gold and silver fish in the pond. I had got a long way up an olive-tree when I saw my mistress and my aunt looking at me through their glasses from the window. I could not hear what they said, of course, but I felt sure they were admiring my skill in climbing, and my courage in being out in such weather; so I clambered up higher, and sat still on a slender branch with the rain streaming over me. It quite took away my breath, and only the thought of being admired sustained me. Since then I have seen human beings equally silly, and bearing all sorts of discomforts for the sake of an admiration

which probably all the time they are not receiving. I learnt this lesson once for all, and rather bitterly; for in the evening, thinking I would honour the drawing-room with my company, I was received with a torrent of reproaches. 'You little pig! don't come to me!' said one. 'Oh, how wet your coat is! quite spoilt, and not fit for the drawing-room!' exclaimed another. 'You silly cat! I saw you up in a tree this afternoon getting wet through; what a little goose you were!' Even my master had no good word for me. Looking over his spectacles he merely said, 'You wild little thing, I hardly know you; go along into the kitchen!' All this was very mortifying and disagreeable, so I slunk off to Marie, who loved me in spite of all; and there, sitting by the coals, I made some new resolutions, which I am glad to say I kept. I first cleaned myself, then ate my supper, and remained indoors all night. The next day my coat was dry, and it only needed a little care to come all right again. In this it was superior to my mistress's black fur, for that was spoilt if a drop of water fell upon it. I soon resumed my old habits, and spent my mornings and evenings botanizing with my master, and lived much in the studio. People used often to come in to see all that was there, and were always especially introduced to me as the model cat; for I had forgotten to say that the first person my master modelled in clay was myself,

and a very fine *alto rilievo* I made, my profile being good in spite of my aunt's constant assertion that my nose was too long. A great Roman sculptor came in one day and was quite enchanted with me—my model, I mean—and I am sure his opinion was valuable, he had such a good face and honest eyes.

I have some difficulty in remembering in what order events occurred in our happy home life; one day, I know, it might all have been broken up, and very sadly too, for my master set fire to the house and then ran away and left it. I am quite sure he couldn't have meant to burn us all, but I heard my mistress and my aunt tell him so in the evening, and tease him about it. It seems there was a great branch of withered heath in the drawing-room, and he stuffed it into the fire to burn it; presently rolls of black smoke curled out of the chimney, there was a cracking noise, and, in fact, the chimney was on fire. Everybody began to run about, which I remember from the circumstance that, rushing to the fire-place with a damp cloth, my master trod on my tail, and though in such a hurry he did not forget to ask my pardon: 'Law! the cat, I declare! Poor puss! I beg your pardon.' I mention this to show that my master never forgot politeness to any one, however hurried he was. Well, the end of it was, he thought it was all out, and with his long tin across his back, and his dove-coloured hat on his

head, he scampered down the garden like a boy, and in reality left us in a burning house, for soon the wall grew hotter and hotter. My aunt came flying out of her room in a crimson dressing-gown, with her hair all on an end; Alice went upstairs like a lamplighter (I never saw a real one); and Marguerite was sent off through the wood to the Hotel close by, and brought down two cooks in their white caps and aprons, and a waiter; then followed a time when I thought it best to hide away, for everybody was carrying buckets of water upstairs and slopping it over all that came in their way. Thus the fire was put out, and the house became quiet again.

After this a horrid thought came into the minds of my mistress and my aunt, that we should all be photographed in a group. Now I knew that the chief beauty of my face depends upon its expression, and that that cannot be given by photography; and I determined nothing should induce me to form one of the party. In fact, I thought it a very foolish proceeding altogether,—quite unworthy of the usual wisdom of the family. I knew how it would be: my master's nose would look a yard long; my mistress, who is nearly always bright and laughing, would come out lackadaisical; and my aunt would look sad: so, as I said before, I quite settled to have nothing to do with it. Curiosity, however, prompted me to watch the preparations,

and when the carriage came to the door all were busy filling baskets with flowers, clay tools, models, and other things. I quite forgot, in watching this, the threat of taking me, when suddenly my mistress quietly picked me up and walked off with me to the carriage. I laid still at first, her fur cloak was so warm ; and then I began to get frightened, for we passed people and houses, and I dreaded lest the old woman and the children should see and claim me. It was a terrible morning up in that glaring room, all windows and curtains, hot as an oven. My aunt tried to keep me still in her lap, but all in vain ; I scrambled and struggled, till at last they all said it was useless, and I was allowed to escape ; when, frightened almost to death, I squeezed myself behind shutters and doors, and was at last, after much coaxing and scolding, released, but only to be put into a basket and walked off with by Marguerite. Now I never trusted her, for she gave me many a secret kick and slap, and I felt sure she would take me back to the old woman and the dirty children ; so I screamed and scratched her, stretching myself out of the basket, and at last she shut me up with a good hard pat, and there I cowered, trembling in every limb.

After being jolted and jarred for some time, I heard dear good Marie's voice exclaiming, 'Ah, the little dear ! here she is, safe back again !' And she took me out and kissed me all

over, gave me some milk to drink, and I soon fell asleep.

How I laughed when I saw the result of all this fuss! My master did not look so bad, but my mistress was just a squashed toad, and my aunt like a melancholy old maid. They were better in another group; but I congratulated myself on my bad behaviour, for I am sure justice would never have been done to what they call 'my sweet countenance.'

Spring came at last, and our dear home was more delightful than ever; the large grasshoppers flew about with a loud rattle from tree to tree, the two fish enjoyed life under the soft-dropping little fountain, roses and sweet flowers bloomed everywhere, and the bank under the windows was covered with the great, large, yellow eyes of the mesembryanthemum. The tall white heath faded and died as it stood, but underneath, all amongst its stems, delicate grasses came up, and many wonderful flowers; a bright crimson and orange-coloured thing pushed itself up from underground, and those quaint-looking chocolate and purple-coloured orchids sprang up, even in the paths. We often sat out all together amongst these beautiful things, especially on Sunday afternoons, when my master would poke his nose down on the ground and find exquisite little lichens and mosses, which he held up to be admired by the others.

Sometimes an uneasy sense of the rapidity and changes of life rather depressed me, particularly as Marie had a tiresome habit at that time of putting me into a basket and walking about the woods with me ; 'to accustom me,' as she used to say : but I did not like being 'accustomed' at all, and had I known the aim of all this, I do not know how I should have borne it. We all grew rather dull and uneasy at last. Great boxes came out into the passages ; everybody was plunged over their heads in them ; brackets came down from the walls ; books were shut up ; table-cloths rolled away ; in fact, discomfort was everywhere, so that I took mostly to being in the garden. The end came upon me like a thunder-clap. One morning my mistress got up very early and put on her walking things ; my master ran distractedly up and down stairs in his hat ; my aunt sat quiet and dull ; there was a great banging of doors ; and I made my escape. An old woman, whom I hated, was sitting on the bench outside. I thought soon all this confusion must be over, and I would return. When I did so, what a sight met my view ! Every room empty ; my master, my mistress, my aunt, Alice, Emma, Marguerite, all gone, and Marie standing alone in the kitchen ! She picked me up, kissed me tenderly, and laid me in that horrible basket, only made bearable by the presence of an uncooked mutton-chop. Soon she was trot-

ting down the road with it and me on her arm.

And now came a time I would rather forget ; I dimly recall hours and hours of that terrible basket, whilst hearing, outside, harsh voices and pouring rain. At one time I thought I was buried alive, and I heard afterwards I was put under a tarpaulin on the top of a diligence. Scared and bewildered, at last I was let out, to find myself in a poor, cold little cottage, up in the hills at Briga. But Marie's kind face was there, and by degrees I became reconciled. She and her mother just worship the ground I tread upon ; and, after all, one's mode of life is but a matter of habit. A long time has passed since then. I have reared a handsome family ; my eldest daughter is the pet of the curé, whilst my youngest is kept as a companion for me ; not that I care much for company. I have a past in my life quite unknown to all other cats ; and, to say the truth, I find them rather uneducated and common-place. So I often close my eyes as now, and think in a soothing, lazy way, of the times that are past. I see my former home ; my dear master and mistress so happy, so devoted to each other ; my aunt so content to be with them, and who, if a little sharp at times, always loved me and wished for my improvement ; bright-eyed, merry Alice ; droll little Emma, with her mischievous pranks and her many reels of cotton : I see them and hear their

voices, and I feel that one day perhaps I may meet them all again somewhere, I know not where, when I shall be able to do more than purr and mew, and thank them in a better way for their goodness to a poor little wandering cat.

THE THREE COTTAGES.

PART I.

THE Mesne was a pleasant tract of land on the borders of a royal forest. It was richly decked with gorse, and heather, and fern. A few stately oak-trees and beeches bordered one side of it, and the branches of the silver-stemmed birch danced on the breeze, which was ever to be met there, even when the atmosphere elsewhere was dull and heavy. On the other sides the Mesne was bounded by the green enclosures of the forest, intersected by paths of rapid descent, which led to the mines and collieries of the district and to the cottages of the men who lived and laboured by day and by night in the pits and works. These habitations—mostly of a poor and miserable description—thickly studded the sloping banks; and the populous outlying district, which needed, but did not possess, a church and a pastor to itself, cost many an hour of toil and heartache to Mr. Leslie, the good

Vicar of East W——. The better class of the people, the native foresters, obeyed certain laws and enjoyed certain privileges, both of which were tolerably well defined; but these were constantly broken and infringed by intruders, termed 'foreigners' and 'squatters,' who made their way into the district for the purpose of leading lawless lives, running up hovels for which they paid no rent, and turning out the few sheep they brought with them, or a donkey or two, or a pony, to find their own living in the forest.

The days were past when the forest glades abounded with deer, offering to many wild spirits an unresisted temptation to make them their prey. Since their destruction the gentlemen who preserved game or possessed deer-parks in the neighbourhood, found themselves more annoyed than formerly by the stealthy visits, and sometimes fierce assaults, of poachers, capable of unscrupulously taking the lives of the fearless men, who ran all risk in the defence of property of which they had taken change.

There were only three cottages on the Mesne, and the best of the three belonged to a widow of the name of Alice Hill, commonly addressed as Dame Ailse. From the days of her widowhood she had dwelt on her own little homestead, cultivating her patch of land, chiefly with the help of her two boys. The younger of the lads caused her

a bitter heartache when he enlisted as a soldier; though, after awhile, she brought herself to say that, if he were of a roving disposition, perhaps it was better for him to go that way than another. 'There is a rule in the army; and it is no bad school for a youngster if he choose to learn in it, as our Vicar says; and he would not say it to comfort me unless he believed it true.'

Dame Ailse had a good son left to comfort and care for her: he worked at Farmer Fowle's and kept his mother's place in nice order, too, and every Sunday morning caught the white pony to bear her to the distant church, from which nothing but the heavy hand of sickness kept her.

'There is Dame Ailse and her white pony; come, let us start for church,' was often said at a cottage-door. The Vicar regarded her as the best helper he had in her portion of the parish, and through the summer evenings he would hold a third service of prayer in her cottage for those who could not reach the church; while his wife, a young and delicate woman, was glad to avail herself of Dame Ailse's ready aid and sage counsel with respect to the scattered families she could but rarely visit.

'I see you have people in the Red Cottage again, Mrs. Hill,' said Mrs. Leslie, on one of her visits. 'I always think it a poor, unhealthy place, what with the bad drainage and dirty habits of all those who have hitherto inhabited it.'

‘Indeed, ma’am, so it is; and I don’t look for improvement this time. It is a poor, sickly woman who is come to it, with three children that seem too much for her, and a husband who does not do his best to keep her comfortable.’

‘Mr. Leslie noticed her pale face on Sunday evening.’

‘Yes, ma’am, I know he did. She seems pleased to come here; and certainly she can’t get further.’

‘I dare say you will doctor her,’ said Mrs. Leslie, with a smile, well knowing what good repute Dame Ailse’s doctoring enjoyed.

‘She had the parish doctor, ma’am, for one of the children, and then she spoke to him about herself; but no doctor’s stuff will do her any good—and I am sure Mr. Maltby thought as much. She seems to be in a decline.’

‘Poor thing! And you don’t like what you hear of the husband?’

‘His neighbours can’t like his drunken noise, certainly, ma’am; and he lets them all hear that.’

‘Oh, that terrible curse of drunkenness! how it meets one at every turn!’ cried Mrs. Leslie. ‘But what of the Lamberts? I don’t see dear little Rose at school as usual.’

‘Her mother is ill, ma’am, and thinks poorly of herself; but I have better hopes of her than I have of Sophy Harper.’

‘Harper! is that the name of the new-comers?’

Good-bye. I will call on both families; and in that case I must not sit longer with you.'

Mrs. Leslie had to pick her way through mud and mire up to the Red Cottage.

'How can any one hope to be well in so foul a place? What a dreadful stench! and yet what bright-looking, dark-eyed children those are!' thought the lady, as she approached.

The children, a girl of nine, and another of six, and a boy, whose age seemed between the two, all ran away to hide, and the door was opened by the pallid mother. Mrs. Leslie introduced herself as the Vicar's wife; and the conversation easily turned on Dame Ailse, and the little service held in her cottage, and the distance to church and school.

'To church I am sure you cannot come till this fine air shall have made you stronger; but those three children, can't they attend school?'

'I could not spare Chloe, ma'am, and Anna could not go alone, and Mark, his father did beat him part of the way to school when first we came; but he always ran back again, and now his father speaks of taking him to the pit.'

'Poor boy! beating was not likely to make him love the way to school.'

'He is one that does not mind a word nor a blow, ma'am; not that the child is evil, either.'

'I am afraid, then, he has not been properly taught to mind. It is early training that forms a

child. If you find that you can manage to send the children they need not be alone, for the Lamberts always come to school, and would be good companions for them. Now I must wish you good-bye,' said Mrs. Leslie, rising, feeling that the new acquaintance was not very promising; but she pitied her white face and gentle patience. 'I want to ask Mrs. Lambert how she is; I hear she is ill.'

'I don't know, ma'am, I am sure. I have hardly been outside the gate since we came. I know nobody but Mrs. Hill.'

The visit to the Lamberts was far pleasanter than the visit to the Harpers, though the mother was ill, and rather a low-spirited woman too. A neat little plot of ground surrounded the cottage, which was of a very humble description, consisting of two small rooms: the door of the one which served as kitchen opening on the common; the inner one nearly filled with the white, dimity-curtained bed, in which Mrs. Lambert now lay ill; and a garret upstairs, where the children slept; the whole white-washed and spotlessly clean. The door was now opened by Rose, smiling, her face burnt red with the fire, her hands white with dough.

'Please, ma'am, come in. I have been baking,' said Rose, dropping a courtesy.

'You baking!' exclaimed Mrs. Leslie, looking down with surprise on the happy, blushing child.

'Yes, indeed, ma'am,' said a voice from the bed.

'She has done everything for me all along, but bake, and now she has done that. Betsy Cox could not come, as she has done till this time, and Rose did so beg to try. Of course, she had to get on the stool to shove the bread into the oven, she is so short; but, thank God, there has been no accident, and I do believe the bread will be beautiful!'

'It smells excellent,' said Mrs. Leslie. 'You have indeed a handy child. What a comfort she must be to you!'

'Yes, ma'am, she is. I have good children and the kindest of husbands. Poor Lambert! he is so nervous when anything ails me; he would like me to have both doctors, and take all the medicine they would both send me. He would not grudge me anything.'

Mrs. Leslie laughed.

'I am sure neither Dame Ailse nor I would wish him to prove his kindness in this manner. One good doctor at a time must be enough, and you have one I place much confidence in, so if you obey him I expect you will soon improve.'

Mrs. Lambert looked cheered by this assurance.

'I suppose, ma'am, you have noticed Rose's absence from school?'

'Yes, I have; but I see it cannot be otherwise for the present.'

'No, ma'am, it can't. Rose would never stay

away if she could help it; you know that, I am sure. We do hope to spare her for Sunday school still, for Lambert says he'll look after me himself, and heat the dinner, to let Rose go.'

'Well, that is very kind. Is he working days or nights now?'

'Days, ma'am; and that is a comfort to me.'

'I must go now, for Mr. Leslie is to meet me at the White Gate just about this time. He will come to see you soon.'

Mrs. Leslie had not long been gone when Lambert came in.

'Father, here is a hot cake for your tea, and it is Rose's baking,' were almost the first words his wife spoke.

Lambert, a large muscular man, picked Rose up in his arms, and held her as high as his head.

'Why, Rose, how could you reach to put the bread into the oven?'

'You must stay at home, father, next time, and then you can lift me up to put it in and take it out.'

Mrs. Lambert ventured on a bit of hot cake; Lambert and the children pronounced it the best they had ever eaten. Rose was modest, and said nothing.

Such as was the difference between the two cottages and their inmates on this day, such it continued to be for months. The two wives remained

sickly. Chloe, Mark, and Anna, ran wild with long, tangled black hair, and clothes as ragged as ever. Rose cheerfully prepared her little sisters and brother morning after morning for school, watching them from the door occasionally with a sigh before she turned to her work. Dame Ailse grew more intimate with both families, for she often dropped in with many a useful suggestion and kind word of comfort. Lambert she knew as a thoroughly honest, good-hearted fellow, working hard, and faithfully laying out on his family all his wages, except the portion set aside for his club; nor did he ever cross the threshold of the 'Hare and Hounds,' except on the evening when the club money was paid up there; and then no invitations, and much less taunts, could prevail on him to tarry in good fellowship, not even if a neighbour offered to stand treat with good-nature free from contempt.

'I wish the club money could be taken anywhere else,' said Dame Ailse one evening to Lambert; 'it does you no harm, but many a poor fellow stops to his own hurt who would pass the door in safety if he were not forced to attend.'

'Very true, dame,' said Lambert. 'Joe Jackson actually told me he had left off paying into the club, because he felt those weekly attendances were going near to make a drunkard of him. I told him he ought to be master enough of himself to pay

down his money and come away, but he can't trust himself.'

'Then he is right to stay away,' cried Jenny Lambert. 'I am sure if I were Betsy Jackson I would much rather forfeit the advantage of the club than let him run the risk. It is a comfort that you have resolution.'

Lambert looked a little pleased with his wife's congratulation.

'I can't ruin you and the children.'

'And you can't sin against God,' said Jenny quietly, just touching her husband's arm as she spoke. 'You know how you repeated Mr. Leslie's words to me last Sunday—what he said in his sermon; and it is the fear and the love of God that keep you straight, I know.'

Lambert said nothing; with him silence gave consent, for he was far too honest to let a word pass for true that was not true.

'Yes,' said Dame Ailse, 'Mr. Leslie did say, and he said it well, that nothing but the fear and love of God will keep us straight. Men may shun one sin from prudence, and another from the fear of the law, but it is none but the servant of Christ who will try to keep from sin altogether, simply because it is sin.'

'Do you know, dame,' said Lambert, 'that Dick Harper was carried off to the County Hospital to-day?'

‘Yes, I saw him into the cart, and persuaded poor Sophy not to attempt to go with him. His hurt need never have brought him to such a strait had he been a man of sober habits. I may say so without scruple, for his neighbours have but too many opportunities of knowing his ways.’

‘No doubt hard drinking goes against a man in times of sickness and accident. ’Twas a branch of a tree that fell on Dick when he was at work for the charcoal-burners. His arm did not seem much hurt at the time,’ said Lambert.

‘No,’ said Dame Ailse, ‘and if he had bided at home and let me tend it, I believe it would have been cured ere now; but he is best where he is, for he must mind what is said to him there.’

‘Sophy will have hard work with the children, and will fret about Dick; and he can’t write, and she can’t go to see him.’

‘But really, Dame Ailse, I do think it must be worse for her when he is at home than when he is away,’ said Mrs. Lambert.

Some weeks after this conversation between Dame Ailse and the Lamberts, Dick Harper walked into his cottage.

‘You back again, Dick!’ cried Sophy, in accents of joy, for she loved him still, in spite of bad usage.

The children slunk away instead of clinging round him. Dick sat down weary and gloomy.

'I am not well yet, and I am not going to be well yet. I have to go back again. What's for supper?'

Sophy produced a rasher of bacon, and while she toasted it asked no questions, for she saw Dick was in no humour to answer any. The family had lived on short commons during his absence, and Chloe's large eyes watched the disappearance of the chief part of mother's little stock of food down father's throat with sensations certainly not of pleasure, feeling in her heart that they were 'comforbler with only mother.'

Dick went prayerless to bed, and seemed to sleep heavily. Next morning he bared his arm, and showed Sophy a sore terrible to look on.

'They say it will never heal; and if it don't, it will be the death of me, unless ——' Dick broke off abruptly.

Sophy dared not ask for explanation; she scarcely dared to shed silent tears, expecting a rough rebuke for doing so. At length, commanding her voice as well as she could, she cried, 'O Dick, dear Dick, do show it to Dame Ailse! I think more of her than I do of all the doctors. She cured poor little Polly Gay's scald, and Jack Bennett's leg, and ——.'

Dick stopped his wife's talking impatiently, and went out of the cottage without telling her whether he should follow her advice or not. At first he

walked straight away from Dame Aïse's cottage ; then, turning round, took the path to it, knocked for admittance, and, entering, found a friendly welcome. On the Dame's inquiry after his health, his countenance fell ; then, struggling as if with a shy repugnance, he said, 'I know, Dame, you have often done a sight of good to sick folk. It would be a relief to my mind just to tell you what those gentlemen at the hospital say.'

'I should like to hear,' replied Mrs. Hill, who always felt an interest in a doctor's opinion.-

'They say this arm will never heal.' He bared it. Alice started at the sight, and he saw her start. He went on in a deep voice : 'They say if it don't heal, I am a dead man—unless I part with my limb.' Silence followed these words. Alice never took her eyes from the arm. 'They have sent me here to make up my mind,' Dick went on, 'and to be strengthened a bit by the fresh air.'

'I should like to try,' said Alice, raising her eyes to his face. 'I am not afraid, if you are not.'

'I can't be more afraid of you than of them,' said Dick, gloomily.

Alice rose, fetched her ointment, and dressed the arm. 'Come again night and morning.'

Dick thanked her and went away.

The dame, when her son Fred came in to dinner, told him what she had done. 'I should like to save the poor soul's arm!'

'I wish you may, mother; but unless he can keep away from the "Hare and Hounds," your chance is nought,' said Fred, rising from the table.

'Surely I need not warn him of that?'

'He has had warning enough, if he can take it,' said Fred.

Alice spared not a plain word of counsel when next Dick came.

'Never fear!' said Dick, gruffly. And some days later Sophy ran in with joy to tell Dame Ailse that Dick never went near the public-house now.

'Then he will do well,' replied Alice confidently.


And sure enough the arm healed. Alice and Sophy hoped Dick would henceforward prove an altered man, and Fred would not damp their hopes. These hopes were not founded on any strong professions of reform or lively expressions of gratitude on Dick's part, but rather sprang from the goodness of their own hearts and sense of what ought to be. No doubt Dick was obliged to Dame Ailse, and had been frightened and startled by the danger he had run. Probably he meant to abstain from excessive indulgence in the evil habit which had nearly cost his life. But Dick was not a penitent. He did not mourn over past sin because it had been an offence to God; he did not implore grace to sin no more; he did not pray to God to change his heart, that so he might change his life. He knew that his character and his pocket suffered as

well as his health ; that his wife was wretched, his home squalid, his children ragged. He knew all this, but he did not turn to the only cure for sin. He did not seek the Saviour of sinners.

Four years passed away, and Dick Harper was a drunkard still. Poor, patient Sophy lay in her grave, and the neighbours spoke of her children with pity. They ran ragged and hungry about the forest. Rose Lambert was more than ever her mother's right hand, for Mrs. Lambert was still a sickly woman.

'What a difference between the two families !' sighed Dame Ailse, as she returned from a visit to the Lamberts and went on to the wretched Red Cottage occupied by Dick and his children. 'What a difference between Rose and Chloe ! Yet I don't think Chloe is a bad-hearted girl after all. She has never had the advantage of such a mother as Rose possesses, and now she is left to her father, what is to be expected ? He provides for them in the most irregular manner possible, sometimes leaves them almost without food, scarcely thinks of their clothing, frightens them when drunk, and is but surly when sober. And Chloe has a spirit not easily cowed. How persisting she is ! few children would venture again and again after my apples as she does, by broad daylight too !'

'Chloe !' said Dame Ailse, as she entered—Chloe started with a guilty face—'why will you go



on stealing my apples? You were in my orchard again yesterday.'

Chloe did not deny the charge. She would if she could have done so with any chance of deceiving; but when Dame Ailse repeated her question, 'Why will you steal my apples?' she said, 'I like to give them to the children!'

'You seem to me to like stealing for stealing's sake; for you know if you asked me I would give you apples.'

Chloe hung down her head, and was thinking surely Dame Ailse would never give her as many apples as she took. The good dame cast a look of compassion on little Anna seated on the dirty floor.

'Now, Chloe, take a broom, and let me see you clean the room. You can't like to see Anna sitting there.'

Dame Ailse expected the answer: 'We have not got a broom.'

She glanced round at the broken window stuffed with straw, the door kept open to let out the smoke, the chair, and table that looked as if it never was rubbed clean.

'Come home with me, and I will lend you a broom.'

To the loan of the broom the kind woman added a gift of some apples, and came back with Chloe to show her how to tidy a room. When that task was

completed as far as could be hoped for, Dame Ailse put her hand on the handle of the door of an inner room.

'You can't go in there,' cried Chloe. 'Father told me that I never was to let anybody get into that room by any means. Besides, father keeps the key.'

'Of course, if your father keeps the key I can't go in,' replied the dame quietly, thinking Dick must have reasons for this secrecy.

Chloe stole no more apples. One day Fred came home to dinner much discomposed.

'Farmer Fowle can't understand it, and I can't understand it.'

'Understand what?' asked his mother.

'Why, the cows are falling off in the quantity of milk they give. Missus is complaining, master is asking the reason why. I am sure Andrew is as honest a fellow as any on the farm.'

'When can an opportunity be found for stealing any?' said Mrs. Hill.

'That is more than I can tell. Andrew says it is impossible to do so in the field, and Betty says it is impossible in the dairy.'

Next morning Fred left his bed an hour earlier than usual, and with every precaution hastened to the place where the cows were always milked. He took care not to cross the grass lest his steps should leave a track behind him by the brushing off of the

dew. He carefully ensconced himself in a thick apple-tree, which he easily climbed, and waited to see who would next appear in the field. To his utter amazement Chloe came tripping along, pail in hand. He could scarcely refrain from a cry which would have betrayed him ; but he resolved to watch her further proceedings. She went straight to the little Alderney cow, and with great quickness and dexterity half filled her pail, rose from her knees, and was advancing towards another cow when Fred let himself drop from the tree, striking terror into the child before she recognised either his person or his purpose.

‘A mighty fine apple has fallen in your path, my girl, has it not ? Lucky for you that it did not fall on your pate and break it, or on your can and upset it.’

Chloe, now seeing and understanding very well who was addressing her, gave a scream, dropped her can and ran from the field with the swiftness of a chased animal. Fred looked disturbed.

‘Think of the child turning out such a bold thief ! Farmer Fowle must know of it. He might send her to prison for it, poor motherless thing ! Poor Sophy ! what would she have felt had this happened in her lifetime ! I would give a good deal for it not to have happened now. But Andrew must not be blamed.’

Fred picked up the can, he could not pick up

the milk, and walked quickly away. When honest Andrew arrived he was much puzzled at the sight of the stream of milk not yet dried up. A broken branch of apple-tree and scattered leaves next attracted his notice, though he was by no means quick of observation. He scratched his head and said :

‘Sure enough some one has been here before me, and master shall hear of it.’

Farmer Fowle did hear from Fred and Andrew all they had to tell, and lent a merciful ear. He spoke of the matter with the good dame of the Mesne.

‘You see, Mrs. Hill, I am sorry for that poor bit of a thing, half starved, maybe, and left to run wild in the forest. I can’t resolve to have her up before a magistrate ; and yet, perhaps, I should act the part of a true friend if I did. You just go to see the girl and speak with her, and give me a bit of advice afterwards.’

Alice went to the Red Cottage to try to speak with Chloe. The door was locked ; no one answered, nor was Chloe within reach of hearing. Father had bid her keep out of the way, and beat her severely because she had been found out.

Next day the cottage was open, the key in the door, the premises forsaken ; nothing left to the possessor in amends for the arrears in the rent but a few undug potatoes.

Months passed away, and nothing was heard of the Harpers. No one spoke of them, but Alice could not forget poor Sophy's children, and sometimes went over in her mind the days when she doctored Dick's arm and had some hopes of him.

One wet, dreary November afternoon, as Mrs. Hill sat by the fire waiting for the kettle to boil, there came a tap at the door, timid at first and then louder. The first tap was quite lost in the dashing of the rain against the casement; the second and third reached the dame's ear, and she went to the door. Two wretched little figures stood there, Chloe and Anna. In spite of the broken, torn umbrella Chloe held, they looked as if they had not a dry rag on them.

'May we come in, please?' said Chloe, dropping a courtesy; but before her words were spoken, Mrs. Hill had brought them in. She threw some fresh sticks on the fire; her eye ran over the children, and she saw that they had grown taller, though very thin and pinched-looking. Chloe's black locks hung down her back, and were at this moment dripping like the separate streams of a little waterfall; her great black eyes looked startled at her bold proceeding in offering herself and Anna at Dame Ailse's door in such a condition as theirs. The kind woman proceeded to dry their wretched garments as far as was possible. and, without inquiries whence or why they came, placed two cups beside

her own, a large brown loaf and a piece of butter. Anna knocked Chloe with her elbow, a sparkle of joy on her wan little face. Chloe checked her with a grave look.

‘Now, my dears, you must have some tea,’ said Mrs. Hill, kindly, but gravely too. ‘It is sad weather for you to have come out. You will have other clothes at home?’

‘No,’ said Anna.

Have you come from far, Chloe?’

‘Yes.’

‘Dear, dear! you can’t go back to-night. Your father will expect you.’

‘Father was gone out, and had taken Mark. He has not been at home for two days; we had not anything left to eat, and we did not know anybody who would be kind to us but you.’

Fatigue, warmth, and food soon made the children drowsy. Anna fell fast asleep, and Chloe followed her example. Mrs. Hill made them up a bed on the floor and laid them in it, while she herself passed a restless night.

‘Give them a good breakfast and send them off in the morning,’ was Fred’s advice. His mother quite agreed with him about the breakfast, and did not notice the rest of his speech. He left the house before the children had stirred from their sleep. Their ragged clothes were dry. The dame looked them over, and put a few stitches here and

there to hold them together, but repair was impossible. She was trying to find some article in her drawers which could be turned to account, when she perceived Chloe's black eyes fixed upon her.

'Get up, Chloe; dress yourself, and help me to get the breakfast.'

Chloe was out of bed in a moment, began to dress quickly, and would have dispensed with all washing, had not Mrs. Hill interfered. Then there was Anna's getting up; and Chloe, anxious to give satisfaction, scoured her well, and rubbed her till she shone. Mrs. Hill bid the children kneel beside her, and said a simple prayer; as they rose she thought Chloe's eye was moistened by a tear. She gave them good slices of bread and hot milk and water.

'And now the day is fine, and you must be starting home,' said the dame, taking from a peg her bonnet and shawl, as if to accompany them.

'You can't go with us,' gasped Chloe, and then she went on as if desperate. 'We don't want to go. We want to bide with you.'

'You must bide with your father. Who is to do for him if you are away?'

'There is not much to do,' said Chloe.

'You must have food to prepare.'

'He almost starves us,' said Chloe.

'Does he not ever give you a bit of meat to cook?'

'He brings in birds,' said Chloe ; and then getting violently red she cried, 'He would kill us for telling, I know. Do let us stay ! We will do anything you bid us, indeed we will ; only don't send us back ; we have run away.'

'You must not run away, and I must see your father.'

'He is not at home,' said Chloe, doggedly. 'You won't find him.'

'But he must come home. What work does he do?'

'He works at the Fancy Pit sometimes, and he takes Mark with him. Mark is with him now.'

Mrs. Hill having learned thus much, resolved to let the children stay, and to see if Dick did not come to inquire after them. Fred smiled when he found them at dinner, as if had expected their company. He asked a few questions, and drew answers which made it pretty clear that Dick was drinking hard, working little, and ill-treating his children, and that men came to his cottage at night, and then they all went out together. Chloe silenced Anna, saying, 'Father would half kill her if he heard her talking about him.' Fred gave his mother a look which said that he believed Chloe's words.

Two days passed and no Dick Harper appeared. Mrs. Hill made Chloe sew and Anna pick up sticks,

and kept them out of mischief, but she felt they were not desirable inmates of the cottage.

Rose Lambert, who came in with a message from her mother, opened her eyes wide at the sight of Chloe; and Chloe, Dame Ailse being out of hearing, said with a self-satisfied, important air, in reply to Rose's 'You, Chloe?' 'Yes, we are staying with Mrs. Hill.'

Fred, at supper-time, expressed himself very unwilling that his mother should be 'put about' by the continued stay of these girls, one of whom they knew to be untrustworthy, and both full of the tricks and bad habits of ill-trained children.

'I shall take an afternoon, mother, and walk over to the Fancy Pit, and get hold of Harper somehow. He can't think he is going to shove off his children on other folk in this fashion.'

'Poor little things!' said Mrs. Hill, and next morning she asked Fred to let another day pass without seeking Harper. It was no small comfort to her to see Mr. Leslie coming across the Mesne soon after Fred's departure. She went to meet him and told him what had happened.

'Of course it is out of the question for you to keep the children,' he said.

'And yet I can't bear to send back the poor motherless things to such a father. I can't say to such a home, for home there is none.'

'Chloe is a great girl now, and surely might be doing something for herself.'

'But then, sir, one could not speak a good word for her in service; she could not be trusted; and if we said that, no one would take her to have the trouble of watching her, and if left to herself she might go very far wrong.'

'That is a sad hindrance, certainly,' said Mr. Leslie, thoughtfully. 'Otherwise I had been thinking that if Chloe could be disposed of you might have kept Anna for a little and have sent her regularly to school with the Lamberts, good, little steady things as they are. She is so young she can't be incorrigible. Of course I do not mean that you should be burdened. I will see after Harper and tell him that it is his positive duty to support his children. In fact, he must be compelled to do so. I do not know him much, yet he did not seem to me so thoroughly heartless as to turn these children adrift.'

'Of course he would not, unless he thought some one would care for them. Fred is dissatisfied——'

'As well he may be,' said Mr. Leslie. 'Tell him to keep quiet for a day or two, and I will see what can be done.'

Next morning Mrs. Leslie came to the Mesne.

'Mrs. Hill, I have a proposal to make concerning Chloe. She cannot be considered a good girl, certainly. If Farmer Fowle had brought her be-

fore a magistrate, the magistrate would most likely have sent her to a Reformatory ; but as the farmer spared her (better for her, perhaps, had she not been spared), that can't be done now. I have a friend who has made a small home for girls who have never been convicted by law, but still are known not to be strictly honest. After a certain course of training she tries to find them means of self-support, according to her opinion of their characters and abilities. Now Mr. Leslie and I would be willing, considering poor Chloe's loss of her mother and the hardness of her father, to pay half the expenses of sending her to this home if Harper will pay the other half and give you Anna's keep. It would not be right to do more for him.'

'Oh, ma'am, you are very kind ! but I don't expect we shall get any money out of him, and perhaps he would object to his girl going to a Reformatory or any place like one.'

'This is not a Reformatory. But pray sit still, Mrs. Hill.' And Mrs. Leslie rose hastily, and approached the door of the little parlour into which Mrs. Hill had respectfully led the Vicar's lady. Half the door was of ground glass, and Mrs. Leslie's eye had been caught by the dark outline of a face bowed down to the keyhole : it must be the face of some one intent on overhearing their words, and not aware that the strong light from the house-door made her quite visible to them inside the

room, though, of course, only like a figure cut out in black paper. The meanness of the action roused Mrs. Leslie's indignation, and, stepping forward, she opened the door quickly, and Chloe tumbled into the room.

'For shame, Chloe!' said Mrs. Leslie.

Chloe jumped up, red and angry, turned round, darted out of the house, and ran towards the enclosure.

'Dear Dame Ailse, I could not bear to see your life made wretched by such a wild, untaught girl as that.'

'Indeed, ma'am,' replied Mrs. Hill, earnestly, 'though Chloe has not shown herself in good colours just now, I do not believe her to be past mending; and such a place as you name would be better for her than my cottage.'

Chloe ran along the green path till she came to a place where four ways met, and, choosing the steepest of the four, ran down it till she threw herself breathless on a bank of heather, her face hidden in her hands, and cried and sobbed, where there was none to hear. The proud, passionate language of her heart was, 'I won't go! They shan't force me to a 'formatory! Dame Ailse said father would never let me go to such a place. I would have stayed with Dame Ailse, and done anything for her, that I would, if she had only been kind to Anna and me!'

PART II.

CHLOE, when she took refuge in the forest, had not found so lonely a spot as she thought. Rose Lambert came by with a basket on her arm. She was in search of elder-berries for Farmer Fowle's wife, whose elder-wine was known far and near.

'Oh dear, Chloe! lying here on the wet grass! What can be the matter?' cried kind little Rose, putting down her basket, and seating herself on a stone at Chloe's side.

Chloe neither moved nor spoke.

'Don't cry, Chloe,' said Rose, very gently; 'it makes one feel so bad.' (I suppose Dame Ailse has sent her away, was her thought.) 'Don't cry. Are you going home? Where is Anna? Chloe,' (Rose's pretty face brightened with pleasure), 'I'll tell you what you shall do. Come in to tea with us before you go. I have been baking to-day, and we shall have a hot cake.'

Rose could never think of her baking without a little, a very little pride.

'No,' said Chloe, beginning to sit up; 'no, thank you, Rose. You are kind, but I shall go back to Dame Ailse now. I only came here just to get away. I am so miserable.'

Chloe hid her face, and cried afresh, Rose sitting by full of pity and of curiosity also. By degrees she

drew from Chloe an account of all that had happened. When she described herself with her ear to the keyhole Rose's cheek glowed.

'That was not right,' she cried.

'Where was the harm of it?' asked Chloe, fiercely.

Rose quietly answered, 'You know you did not like them to find you there.'

Chloe looked ashamed, but took no notice of these words; she only burst out passionately, 'I won't go to a 'formatory! they sha'n't send me!'

Rose looked grave. 'I don't know what a 'formatory is; and, you know, Mrs. Leslie said it was not a 'formatory. I don't know what a home is, excepting just home, you know, where father and mother are; but I am quite certain that Mrs. Leslie and Dame Ailse would never want to send you anywhere that was not the place for you; and I advise you—oh, Chloe, I do beg of you, just to do whatever they tell you!'

'I won't!' said Chloe. 'I won't go to be made good!'

'Not to be made good!' cried Rose. 'Why, it is just what you want to be. It is just what we say in our prayers every day.'

'What you say,' replied Chloe, moodily.

'Don't you say it?' asked Rose in surprise.

'Not since mother died. I have forgotten since then'

‘Forgotten your prayers!’ cried poor little Rose, in great distress. ‘Oh! that is how you forget to be good. Oh, Chloe, do remember your prayers,—do say them,—do say them now, that you may remember them.’ And the child sank on her knees, caught Chloe’s hand, and said very simply a little morning prayer: ‘Pray, God, make me a good child.’ Then she added: ‘Make Chloe good; make her remember her prayers, for our Lord Jesus Christ’s sake. Amen.’ Then she repeated the Lord’s Prayer and the Blessing, and rising up, put her arms round Chloe’s neck, and gave her a kiss.

Chloe was much moved.

‘Dame Ailse makes us say our prayers; but if she sends me away, I shall be as bad as ever.’

‘Not if she sends you to a good place, where you would be taught. You would be sure to say your prayers there; and if you got good you would be quite happy.’

Rose smiled so brightly that Chloe could not help feeling pleasure in looking at her; but Rose jumped up.

‘I must not sit here. Mrs. Fowle promised me sixpence if I filled this basket before dusk, and there are very few berries this year; I have to seek about for them. Do help me, Chloe, to make up for lost time. I don’t mean lost—I am so glad I came. But do help me, Chloe.’

Chloe could not refuse, and as the two girls went through the thicket, Rose frequently repeated her advice, and urged Chloe to do as Mrs. Leslie and Dame Ailse would have her.

When Chloe came back Mrs. Hill said nothing, but looked grave; Anna teased her sister with questions, who, in return, would have slapped her had they been alone. After a little hesitation she said :

‘I have been helping Rose Lambert to pick elder-berries.’

Mrs. Hill seemed rather surprised. Chloe fancied that she was not believed, and repeated, somewhat in a tone of defiance :

‘I found Rose in the wood; she was picking berries for Mrs. Fowle. I helped her, and she wanted me to go home with her to tea.’

‘You were right to come back here,’ said Mrs. Hill, gravely.

‘What! she does not like me to be with her favourite Rose!’ thought Chloe, with angry shame. ‘She does not think me fit for her!’

That night the moonbeams shone through the casement and fell across the little bed on the kitchen floor, where Anna was sleeping soundly and Chloe tossing restlessly. It had been a dark, dull night, and possibly the sudden brightness of the moon caused the girl to start from her sleep. She sat up in her bed, then silently left it, and rapidly

slipped on the clothes lying near, stole softly to a window at the back of the cottage, unfastened it with as little noise as possible, and let herself drop through it to the ground. She stealthily crept along the path towards the enclosure. It was eleven o'clock; the inmates of the cottage slept soundly, and Chloe felt herself entirely free to follow her own will. The softness produced by Rose's persuasion had hardened again.

'I won't go to be made good by them. I would be good enough if Dame Ailse would try me, but I won't be sent away by any one; and to a sort of prison, too, I do believe.'

Where, then, was she to go? Back to her father's hovel? She was on the road to it. She was thinking over her chance of getting into it at this hour. Likely enough her father would be out. She remembered with a sort of terror his late returns, when she would lie still and pretend to be asleep, and yet was well aware of ill-looking companions and hidings of a bag she knew the look of—a sack sometimes full-stuffed, sometimes lank and lean. If she waited about the hut till her father came, he might think her a spy, and kill her almost. And if she lingered till morning, and then entered, what should she enter to? Anna would be waking up to wash and to dress herself in the clothes already so much neater than they were, and to kneel down at Dame Ailse's side, and say a

prayer ; and then the neat table, and bread enough and to spare !

Oh, happy Anna ! and miserable, miserable Chloe ! Why was she making herself so miserable ? Because she would not submit herself to those who were good, and kind, and anxious to befriend her.

Chloe came out into an open place, where she suddenly gained a whole view of the sky. The moon, which had looked so high from her window, was much lower now ; it was fast going down. Chloe stopped short, startled at the idea of spending the night in darkness in the wood. Her own footsteps began to frighten her ; a sort of perception began to steal over her that she was wilfully leaving light behind her to plunge into darkness ; refusing to learn to live that better life her mother would have had her live, and following a path which could lead only to evil. The remembrance of Rose's earnest prayer and earnest entreaty to her to pray came across her, and murmuring, ' O God ! forgive me ! pray forgive me—pray make me good—I will do whatever they like—pray keep me fast to this ! ' she turned, and in a few minutes came in sight of the cottage, which ' seemed itself asleep,' stole to the window, which she found open as she had left it, scrambled in, crept to her bed, lay down shivering at Anna's side, crossed her arms on her breast, and at length, with the words hang-

ing on her lips, 'Pray, God, make me good! make me like Rose!' fell asleep.

On that same night a set of lawless men stole along under an old Park wall, scaled it at a spot well known to them, and swept down into the valley where the deer lay, like silent spectres in the dim starlight. Two of the men went on their knee to take a truer aim. Just then came a sudden rush from a thicket. Dogs and keepers are upon them; a fierce onset, a stern struggle; the keepers fight like determined, the poachers like desperate, men. Two poachers are captured; one keeper rolls on the ground—the charge of a rifle has passed through his thigh; his comrades have enough to do to secure their captives, and the remainder of the party escape. A dog pursues, overtakes, and fiercely tears the arm of a man who is climbing over the wall; he manages to shake off the animal, and flies, leaving a track of blood behind. He pursues his flight till he gains a distance, at which he thinks he may safely pause; and then, leaning against a paling, he binds up his wounded arm as well as he can, and mutters, in a tone of dismay, 'Caught in the old place, worse luck, I see!'

The day after Chloe's feeble attempt to escape she went about so subdued in manner, that Mrs. Hill saw that her rebellious spirit had passed away,

and a spirit of obedience had been granted to her. God had softened her heart. Fortunately for her, Mr. Leslie came while she was in this better temper.

‘I have not seen Harper,’ he said. ‘He has not worked at the Fancy Pit this week; he has left his cottage and taken the boy with him, and was heard to say he had found work quite on the other side of the Forest. However, I have taken means to learn his beat, and no doubt I shall know all about him soon.’

‘There was terrible work two nights since in Sir Henry Owen’s park,’ continued Mr. Leslie, looking very grave. ‘One of the keepers, young Moreton, a brave fellow not to be daunted in doing his duty, was badly shot. His poor wife has a baby only six weeks old. Two poachers were captured, three escaped.’

While Mr. Leslie was speaking, Chloe turned as pale as ashes, and shook like a leaf.

‘Why do you shake so?’ cried Anna; but her sister silenced her by a sharp knock.

‘Meantime,’ continued Mr. Leslie, glancing at Chloe, but addressing himself to Mrs. Hill, ‘Mrs. Leslie has written to know if Chloe can be admitted on trial in the Home she named to you. When there, her stay will depend on her own conduct. It would be a great blessing to her to get such training.’

Chloe hung her head in silence ; but when Mr. Leslie was out of sight, and Dame Ailse again in her customary seat, the child darted towards her, knelt down, hid her face on her lap, and sobbed violently. The kind dame placed her gentle hand on Chloe's head.

'God have mercy on you, poor child ! and it would be a great mercy for you to go where you could be trained up in His faith and fear, and learn to know His Holy Word. You are just of an age, my maid, when you will turn right or wrong, and you need guidance sadly.'

Chloe could scarcely help looking up and crying :
'Be my guide ! Don't send me away !'

But she was a very determined girl, and having resolved to obey, she did not permit herself to make one objection.

Dick Harper keeping effectually out of the way, the matter so ended that Chloe was taken by Mrs. Leslie to Miss Scott's Home, and admitted on trial ; and Anna stayed on with Dame Ailse, and went to school with the Lamberts. Thus passed the winter.

One afternoon in March Mrs. Hill heard a knock at her door, and in answer to her 'Come in,' Dick Harper raised the latch and entered. The man looked years older since last she saw him. She gave him a kind welcome, for she thought he had done well to come, and she spoke at once of the

children. Dick's manner was gruff and awkward. He pulled out a purse and held it, as if uncertain whether he was paying a debt or making a present. Mrs. Hill took it neither as one nor the other, and quietly remarked that it would be a help for the children, and that she was sure Dick would be much pleased with them if he could see them.

'And you will see Anna in a few minutes, when she comes back from school.'

'A few minutes?' said Dick, uneasily.

'Well, a quarter of an hour, maybe,' replied Mrs. Hill, fancying Dick did not like waiting.

'Then I will lose no time, but tell you what really brought me here,' said Dick, regardless of the selfishness of his words. 'You were my best friend once; and now I am bad again, and I have come all the way to consult you.'

He bared his arm, keenly watching Dame Ailse's face, and scrutinising her first look on beholding it. Formerly he remembered it had lit up with hope, and the burden had been lifted from his heart. Now he saw nothing but blank dismay. The kind woman was truly shocked.

'This is quite beyond me, Dick,' she said. 'Have you shown it to a doctor?'

'No. I have doctored it myself. I got an ointment that looked and smelt something like yours.'

‘You had better far have come for mine, than do such a thing as that.’

‘I thought not,’ said Dick, dryly; ‘and I think now, that much as I was obliged to you for saving the arm, it would have been better for me had I lost it, for all the good I have done with it.’

And pulling down the sleeve, he buried his head in his hands, and was silent, Alice standing by not knowing how to address him. As she caught the sound of the children’s voices she thought, ‘Perhaps the sight of his child may do more than any words.’ She threw open the door, and called Anna, fearing she might loiter with her playmates. The child came running towards her, holding up a book, and crying,

‘See, I have got a prize! I have got a prize!’

Dick rose, and as the child reached the threshold caught her up in his arms, and held her tightly to his breast. The child struggled in alarm.

‘It is father come to see you,’ said Dame Ailse.

Dick put the child down, and went back to his seat, mastering the emotion which he felt ashamed to have shown.

‘Go and show father your prize, Anna,’ said Mrs. Hill.

The book was a New Testament. Dick turned over the leaves, and said,—

‘Can you read it?’

‘Read a verse, Anna,’ said the dame.

The child read where her father had opened the book, and the verse was: 'And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell' (Matt. x. 28).

'I opened the book myself,' thought Dick.

The child went on: 'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. Whosoever, therefore, shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven.'

Dick closed the book and put it on the table. He got up and said he must go.

Mrs. Hill turned to Anna: 'Here, Anna, I'll give you a cake to send to Mark, and ask father to bring him to see you.'

Anna went up to her father, and looked so prettily up in his face as she offered the cake that the tears came into his eyes. She saw him glance wistfully at her book, and said, timidly, 'Take that too, father. I'll give you that, too, till you come again.'

Mrs. Hill put it into his hand, and said, earnestly: 'Take it, Dick.'

Dick hesitated a moment, then kissed his child, muttered a word to Mrs. Hill, and left the cottage. When he had walked some way in the Forest, and was quite sure he was out of sight of all men, and likely to be free from interruption, he seated himself on a stile and opened the book, saying, 'I'll not move from here till I find that place. It was I that found it, and I'll find it again.'

For days, weeks, months, the awful knowledge had slowly impressed itself on his mind that his sin had found him out, that his death-sickness was creeping through every vein. The arts of concealment he habitually practised clung to him; and not only from the fear of exciting suspicion as to the cause of his injury, but also from the habit of hiding, he told it to none. So long as he could lessen his torments by different applications which he eagerly made use of, he went about as if nothing ailed him, with a fortitude worthy of a better cause. But he had felt his case growing desperate, and he had set out for Mrs. Hill's cottage with a desire to see or to hear of his children, and to find out what she thought of his arm.

Mrs. Hill, when next Mr. Leslie came to see her, told him of Dick's visit, and expressed a hope that the sight of his child and a sense of his own danger would soften Harper's heart.

'I hope it may. My wife receives good reports

of Chloe, I am happy to tell you. She is quick and clever in learning, not so much her book as household work.'

'I expected that to be, sir. She ran wild too long for much book-learning, I dare say; but she will make a handy servant if she turns out a good girl.'

Not many days after this conversation Mr. Leslie received a letter from the chaplain of the County Hospital, written, he said, at the request of a man named Harper, who entreated him, if possible, to come into town to see him. 'He was brought in with an arm in a state which required almost immediate amputation. I regret to tell you that the measure will not be productive of lasting good. It was right to resort to it; and, by God's blessing, the days thus obtained may be of the utmost value to the poor man's soul.'

Fortunately, though with no small inconvenience to himself, Mr. Leslie was able to comply with Harper's desire without loss of time. He was brought straight to the sick man's bed, and felt no doubt that a dying man was stretched before him. The hollow eye that glittered at his approach, and the emaciated hand that Harper held out to him, told the tale plainly.

I thought I should like to see you better than any one,' were Harper's words in return to Mr. Leslie's kindly greeting. 'You do care for my

children—poor Sophy's children—and know about them. And I love them dearly, too, now I have left off loving sin.'

Strong signs of emotion showed themselves on Dick's dark countenance.

'Chloe and Anna are going on well; and if you will put me on Mark's track, I will see what can be done to set him right,' said Mr. Leslie.

'Thank you, sir, from my heart. I should dearly like to see Chloe. I have seen Anna. It is all along of that blessed child, and of this book—her present to me—that I am what I am; that I came here and sent for you, instead of dying like a dog in a ditch.'

Here Harper briefly narrated all that had passed in Dame Ailse's cottage, and went on:—'As soon as I got far enough into the wood I sat myself down on a stile, and resolved I would not get up until I had found those words again—not if I stayed till it was dark. "Fear not," I repeated to myself as I turned over the leaves, and came to many a verse that might have done as well if so be the book had opened at them in Anna's hands. But I was determined to find those she read, and at last I did. I read them over and over till my heart felt broken, and I was all of a shiver. I thought, if God took care of the sparrows, which were all about me, perhaps He would not utterly cast me off. But then these innocent birds could not offend Him, and I

did. There is no telling all I thought on, and all I suffered in that wood, sir; and when the sun went down, and I rose to go on my way, I stumbled so along, that if men had seen me they would have believed me drunk; which I shall never be again, nor would not if I got my health and lived ever so long. I am a lost man, sir, as far as body goes, and how dare I hope it will fare better with my soul? I have no hope for either at times; and at times I can't help feeling about for a hope; and I would willingly hear you speak.'

'My poor friend,' said Mr. Leslie, 'I and every other minister of the Gospel have this word of hope for you. For every sin repented of there is forgiveness provided. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord. Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin."'

'Red like crimson! They have been indeed red with blood!' exclaimed Harper, shuddering. 'It is only of God's mercy that I have not the guilt of murder on my soul. Sir, I'll mask nothing from you, or how could I talk of repentance? It was this hand that shot poor Moreton; and it was only the mercy of God, not my mercy, that spared his life. This arm, that is withering to the bone as if the leprosy of sin clung to it, fired that gun.'

'Thank God you did not kill him !' exclaimed Mr. Leslie.

'I was so full of getting myself free that I cared for no man's life. I did succeed in escaping the keepers ; but as I scrambled across a wall a dog seized me, and bit me fearfully, filling me more full of a cowardly savageness than I was before. I managed to beat him off with the stock of my gun, and I ran and ran till I was safe away. When I heard the police were out after the poachers, I thought it wisest to let no man look at my arm, fearing a doctor would guess it came by the bite of a dog. I doctored it myself till it became unbearable, and then I went off to Dame Ailse.'

'And now, Harper, there is yet time to make a full confession of your sin to those against whom you have sinned. In doing this, you will call God to witness that you are heartily sorry for your misdeeds. You can do little else now to prove the truth of your repentance to others or to yourself.'

'Of course, sir, if I were well I should have to give myself into custody ; but lying here — I certainly can't escape.' Dick did not speak in bitterness, but in keen appreciation of the miserableness of his condition.

'Shall I go to Sir Henry Owen, and tell him the whole ?'

'He is a terrible man where his game is con-

cerned, I have heard say; but I need not fear man now.'

'I never found Sir Henry Owen a terrible man about anything; rather hasty, perhaps, and very warm-hearted. He has a great regard for those servants who risk their lives in the discharge of their duty. He knows it to be his duty as a magistrate to bring lawless characters to justice.

Here Dick looked so ghastly that Mr. Leslie hastily brought him some brandy and water.

'These faintnesses come over me,' said Dick, gasping.

'My poor fellow,' said Mr. Leslie, 'trust yourself in my hands to do what I think best for you, and I will return and bring Chloe with me.'

'Sir Henry,' said Mr. Leslie, when he found himself in that gentleman's library, 'you remember that last sad affray with the poachers?'

'Of course I do; and poor Moreton won't forget it till his dying day.'

'No; he won't forget that his life was spared, nor his wife either. But you would be glad to know the man who attempted to take it. It is well to be rid of surmises and suspicions.'

'Oh, I feel little doubt that fellow Staunton fired the gun!'

'No, Sir Henry, he did not,' replied Mr. Leslie,

decidedly. 'The man who did fire the gun sent for me and told me of it.'

'When?'

'Yesterday.'

'And is he still at large?'

'He is on his dying bed in the County Hospital.'

'Some magistrate must take his deposition.'

'If he have not already rendered his account to God, you can take it yourself. He consented that I should come here to acquaint you with these facts; and I think this is a strong proof that he repents of his crimes.'

The young baronet had been taking two or three hasty turns in the room while Mr. Leslie spoke, his forehead contracted by a frown. Now, in a tone of compassion, he said, 'Wretched man!—dying, and remorseful, you think?'

'I do. I think, if not remorseful, he would have died silent. He has been a determined and incorrigible man hitherto, and nothing but his own heart being broken by sense of sin and the near approach of death would have made him speak. His constitution has been undermined by drunkenness. He was in the hospital once before with disease in the arm they have now amputated. The last incurable wound was brought on by the bite of a dog—Moreton's dog; don't you remember how it hung on one of the fellows?'

‘Yes ; and the keepers followed the track of his blood !’

‘It was this very man. So you see his sin has found him out, and his punishment is greater than the law would have awarded. The wages of *his* sin is death.’

Sir Henry asked, in a tone of great seriousness and interest :

‘What, Mr. Leslie, do you feel yourself authorised to say to a man who has led such a life, and is dying such a death as this?’

‘What I say to him is this : That for every repented sin atonement has been made ; therefore if the Saviour, who knows what is in man, judges repentance to be real, pardon will be granted. “In the Cross while I breathe I hope,” may be justly preached ; but as to putting the triumphant words of a matured saint, after a long course of perseverance like St. Paul’s, into the mouth of a new or dying convert—untried as yet, or to whom trial is impossible—I think it would be most perilous and presumptuous. The sufficiency of the atoning blood to cleanse from all sin, the fulfilment of the covenant on God’s side, cannot be too unhesitatingly asserted. There is no fear of any short-coming in the mercy or love of the Saviour. The fear is on our side : and the man who is forced to look back on miserable failure and life-long sin ought not to lift up a song of triumph, but to beat his breast and

say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" I point to the Saviour on the Cross. I say, "You hear His voice saying, Come!" Come, and do all yet in your power to show obedience and repentance; then accept the measure of hope He is pleased to give you. This man is seeking earnestly, by God's help, to do what he yet can do; therefore, it is impossible to think that God's face is hidden from him.'

'Can I do anything to help him?' asked Sir Henry.

'Yes, you can send him your forgiveness, which he anxiously desires; and I must get Moreton to do the same.'

'Moreton is far too fine a fellow to harbour animosity.'

'So I expect'

Moreton at first listened to Mr. Leslie's words with some doggedness, half muttering that he had always thought such men ought to be made examples of, or where was protection for those other men who did their duty?

'You say truly,' replied Mr. Leslie. 'This man has been made a terrible example of. You would not have a dying man moved from his bed to a jail?'

'Not if he is dying; but those poachers have a sight of tricks.'

'May be; but all Harper's tricks are played out. There is nothing now but a terrible reality.'

‘Of course you know best, sir—you are experienced in these things; and if he is deceiving you, all the worse for him. I am sure I forgive him, sir, and hope he may be forgiven. No man could wish another to go unforgiven of God.’

A few hours later Moreton said to his wife :

‘I am not half satisfied with the way I answered Mr. Leslie about that dying fellow. I am just going to walk over to see him.’

‘You walk all those miles and back, and lame yourself for a week?’

‘If I could not walk that far I should be ashamed to keep in Sir Henry’s service; I should not be worth my salt.’

‘I expect the sight of you will kill him!’

‘Oh, no, it won’t! it might if I were a woman; but the sight of one man won’t kill another, and I have nothing to say that will harm him.’

So Moreton walked off. When he reached the hospital he said :

‘Please to tell your patient, Harper, that Moreton the gamekeeper has walked over just to pay him a friendly visit. Mind you say that, and he will see me.’

‘Let him come to my bedside!’ gasped Dick; and Moreton advanced, disguising his limp as well as he could. The tears ran down the honest fellow’s cheek when he saw the feeble creature, whom he could have picked up like a child.

'Truth to tell,' he said, 'I thought you would be happier, maybe, just for a shake of the hand ; and I have no more to say but that it is all right between you and me.'

A light shone in the sick man's eyes.

'God bless you, Moreton, for the kind thought ! God bless you now, and on your dying bed ! Ask your wife to forgive me, and say I wish that years ago I had lost the hand that did the deed !'

'Never say that,' replied Moreton, in a low voice ; 'it is not so bad. It has done me a deal of good. I did not lie on that bed for nothing. I learned there what I was fast forgetting. That sickness proved a blessing to me. I know well it is One and the same Who died for your sin and mine ; and may we both win His forgiveness.'

So they parted.

Mr. Leslie was truly glad to hear of this visit of Moreton's. There now remained nothing to be done but for Dick to see his child, and there was no time to be lost. Chloe was permitted to take up her abode in the hospital, and to watch beside her father's bed, where she sat with a pale face and eyes filled with tears. Harper was perfectly able to speak to her.

'Chloe, my poor girl, I have been a bad father to you, and you saw sad work at home. I am thankful to those that have taken you out of it. I have had a wretched time often in thinking how ill

I treated poor Sophy's children, and how ill I minded her last words. It is little I can do now to show sorrow for sin; but I have prayed for patience in my pain, and for time to speak two words to you, Chloe. You can give me comfort by promising that the past shan't be the ruin of you; that you will try and pray against sin in any shape. Chloe, for the love of the Saviour who died for you, for the love of the mother who is gone, for pity for the wretched father who speaks to you, promise me to keep steadfast in seeking God's help to fight against sin. You can't fight without Him. If you ask God's help you will have it.

'I will try, I do try,' sobbed Chloe, in a voice almost choked by emotion. 'I will try to learn what is right, however hard it seems sometimes. I do say my prayers. I do ask God to help me.'

'Ah, sir,' said Harper, turning to Mr. Leslie for the last time, 'if I had given half the ingenuity, and half the hard work, and half the contempt of danger, to honest endeavours, which I have given to knavery, I might have left a good provision for my children behind me. As it is, I can but pray that they may take warning by the sufferings and death I have brought upon myself.'

'Far be it from me,' said Mr. Leslie, 'to palliate past sin, or to weaken your present repentance. I can but commend you to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. I will, to the best of my power, as-

sist your wishes with regard to your children. Chloe, I am sure, can never forget this awful hour. And now tell me what you can of Mark.'

'He can follow the common course of the work, sir; and if he follow it honestly and steadily, I don't see but that it will be as well for him as any other. He is used to the pit from a child; he watched a door as soon as he was old enough to begin. If you, sir, could get a sight of him from time to time, a word from you would help to keep him straight. It was not by kindness that his father ruled him, poor little chap! A mother-like word from you, Chloe.' Chloe's sobs checked her father's speech. They earnestly clasped each other's hand, and a deep silence followed — a silence when the heart prayeth, a silence which not many hours later deepened for Dick Harper into the silence of death, never to be broken to his ear till 'the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised.'

Chloe did not forget. The hours of agony passed by her father's death-bed told upon the girl like months or years of time. A solemn purpose thenceforward took possession of her mind to watch over Anna and Mark, and to supply to them, to the best of her power, the loss of parents. Miss Scott perceived the alteration in Chloe on her return; she felt that the girl now clung to her as her friend,

eagerly accepting every word of instruction, and thankfully availing herself of the permission to consult her. Miss Scott rejoiced in the change. From time to time Chloe was allowed to visit Mrs. Hill, in order that she might see her brother and sister ; and rarely failed to catch a sight of Mark on these occasions. The intensity of her interest in their well-doing stirred up a feeling in the children themselves beyond any they could otherwise have experienced at their early age. When Chloe was sixteen Miss Scott sought out a place for her as under-housemaid, and before sending her to it she promised her a week on the Mesne, with Mrs. Hill, and Anna, and Mark. Chloe then gladly took the opportunity of seeing something of her friend Rose Lambert, and one day said to her :

‘To you, Rose, I owe all my well-being. Yes ; I know you want to disclaim all share in it, and to tell me that dear Dame Ailse, and kind Miss Scott, and Mr. and Mrs. Leslie, have been my friends ; and I don't know which to call my best, for how could I have done without either of them ? I am sure I am not ungrateful to them, Rose, but still what I first said is true. All my well-being is owing to you. My heart never was so softened as by that meeting with you in the wood. It was the thought of your kind kiss, your kind voice, that drew me back to Dame Ailse's cottage out of the forest on that terrible night !’

Rose, though her modesty did impel her to disclaim all merit, could not now contend with her friend, and with eyes full of tears, and lips smiling, she clasped Chloe's hand, and kissed her cheek.

'Now, tell me all you are going to do?'

Chloe, with warm expressions of gratitude, poured forth an account of all Miss Scott did for her girls when she put them out in the world.

'Only think, Rose, of my having such neat clothes, and not a knot in my hair! How few would believe me to be Chloe if they saw me now!' Then she added, in a low voice, 'Poor father! would he not be thankful?'

Before Chloe took leave she said, 'How nice your children look, Rose! and how well they are getting on at school Anna tells me!'

Rose's little brother and sister had come to be called 'her children,' so much did they owe to her loving care. Who but she washed, dressed, and sent them off to school, and mended their clothes?

'Good-bye, God bless you, Chloe!' said Mrs. Lambert. 'It is a fine thing for you to go to service; but I never could part with Rose. What should I do without her?'

Rose did not hear these words. She was waiting outside the cottage door to say her last words to her friend; and after they were said, and Chloe had departed, she watched to see the wave of the handkerchief from the turn of the path; and even then

she lingered, gazing with a wistful look into the distance, till, with a start, she cried, 'Mother is waiting for her broth !' and entered the cottage.

What were the thoughts which had occupied Rose's mind? She had listened with unmixed pleasure to Chloe's enumeration of every article of the outfit with which Miss Scott's generosity provided her. She scarcely envied her her exit into the 'wide, wide world.' But she had said to herself with regret :

'How much more Chloe knows than I do ! I have lost all my schooling, and she has had such good teaching. I have almost forgotten how to write or sum, and I dare say I should have forgotten how to read if it were not for my chapter with mother each day. How beautifully Chloe read that hymn to mother just now ! and what beautiful letters she will write to Dame Ailse and Anna !'

Don't sorrow overmuch, dear, good Rose. True, it is that the Heavenly Father provides for His children diversely, and has given to the wayward Chloe gifts denied to the grateful, patient Rose. Chloe has turned those gifts to good account, and Rose, no doubt, would have rejoiced in them ; but she has received a different training, and is called to a different service. Only think, Rose, what would have been your mother's sufferings had she had a rebellious child ! True, it has cost you your schooling, and many other things besides, to be her

patient nurse. But have you not her tearful tenderness, and father's approving smile, and the throb of your own warm heart to repay you? God has not dealt grudgingly with you, His child. It is not what we know, nor even what we do, but what we are, that commends us to God's favour and our fellow-creatures' love.

A DAUGHTER'S DUTY.

By MRS. A. PHILLIMORE.

'WHY, Maria, where can you be going? and so smart, too!' exclaimed Fanny Prior, as a girl of her own age appeared at the cottage door, where she stood nursing her baby-brother.

Maria, though she had seemed to be in a hurry, could not resist stopping to explain, and answered, with some importance, 'I am going into town about a place. The carrier yesterday told me that Mrs. Collins, at the grocer's, wants a girl to help in the shop and do house-work, and I'm going to offer for it.'

'And will your mother let you?'

'I haven't asked her. I just told her I meant to go, and she knows I do pretty much as I like; and now that I am past fifteen, I don't see why I shouldn't please myself.'

'But how can you be spared?' said Fanny, with rather a feeling of envy, for she had a great wish to go to service, and 'the town' sounded so much livelier than the quiet little country village where they lived.

'Oh, they must manage to do without me. I'm not going to be a slave to babies all my life,' said Maria, with a toss of her head that nearly sent her flimsy bonnet flying. 'Well, good-bye, Fanny. I'll look in as I come back to tell you if I've got the place, and, if I can, I'll ask about one for you; but I shan't be back till evening.' And so saying off she hurried, having to make up for lost time.

Fanny stood watching her till her mother called her rather impatiently 'to bring the baby in from the sun, it was quite time he was in bed, and to get dinner ready.'

Fanny obeyed, but less readily than usual, for she was thinking of Maria Hicks, and comparing her lot with hers. There were just as many little Hickses as there were Priors, and Mrs. Hicks often went out charing; and yet here was Maria able to go away for a whole day to amuse herself, and to take a place if she liked; while the day seemed hardly long enough for all that Fanny had to do, what with minding the children and the usual housework, besides mending clothes and doing all that her sickly mother could not manage. There was plenty of work for her that day, and she got

through it somehow, but the little ones seemed unusually troublesome ; probably it was her own impatience and discontent that acted on their tempers, and everything appeared to her a burden. It was late in the afternoon when Maria appeared, and her news did not cheer poor Fanny, or lessen the spirit of repining that had taken possession of her.

‘Why, Fanny, I suppose you have nursed that baby all day ! Well, it’s all right, and I have got the place. It isn’t much to begin with ; only 4*l.* and tea and sugar ; but I shall have plenty of liberty. Evenings out when I like, no children to mind, and no mother to be always bothering after me, and no Miss Arden to say, “Maria, why do I never see you at church ?”’ And she mimicked the young lady as she spoke.

Even in Fanny’s discontented state of mind this speech jarred upon her, but she only remarked, ‘You are very late.’

‘Yes, I suppose I am ; but I thought I might as well make a day of it, and there was a circus there, and you can’t think what fun I have had. Oh, and the shops are so smart ! and in a second-hand one I saw such a lovely bonnet !—blue net and pink roses !—only four shillings ! The net is a little faded, but I am sure it will turn, and you never saw anything so genteel—much more stylish than anything Miss Arden ever wears. I went into the shop, and the woman has promised to let me

have it when I go to my place next week, if I can pay her two shillings at once ; only then I must pay her two shillings and sixpence when I get my money.'

'But that is more than four shillings,' said Fanny, who nevertheless felt dazzled by the description of this lovely bonnet.

'So it is ; but the bonnet is worth a great deal more. The woman said it was giving it away, and that she could sell it for more any day.'

'Then why did she ask so little?'

'Really, Fanny, you are very stupid ! I suppose you are envious of my luck ; but I can tell you I didn't forget you, for I asked her if she wanted a girl, and she said she did, and I told her about you. Not such a good place as mine,' she said, consequentially ; 'but still it would do for a beginning.'

'What sort of a place?'

'Oh, well, the wages are the same ; but there are children to mind, and I told her you were precious fond of 'em. She said you had better come in to see her—Mrs. Grimes, in West Street—and the sooner the better, as her girl is going.'

'I wonder if mother would let me go ? I should like to try,' said Fanny, meditatively.

'Don't ask her, but go, and tell her when it is settled.'

'Oh, no ; I couldn't do that ! There's Polly

crying. Good-night, Maria.' And she re-entered the cottage, while Maria leisurely pursued her way home, to find her mother much displeased at her long absence, and so full of reproaches that the selfish girl, instead of feeling sorry, and showing that she was so, rejoiced at the thought of escaping from her home and her mother's tongue, and said so to her family in telling them of the place she had got.

Of course her mother was offended ; and bitter and unkind things were said on both sides, till Maria was stopped by her sister Jane, a pale, slender girl of thirteen, who looked as if she had outgrown her strength, and who was vainly trying to soothe the fretful baby.

' Oh, Maria, do take baby for a bit. I have had her all day long ; she won't lie down, and my back aches dreadfully !'

Maria, who was in a good-natured mood, took the little one and nursed it for a few minutes, and then, finding it quieter, laid it down in the cradle, when it instantly began to cry again.

' Little plague !' she said, without any intention of taking it up again ; but poor overworked Jane, who could not bear to hear it cry, stooped down to take it up, and fainted dead away upon the cradle, nearly crushing the unlucky baby, who screamed worse than ever.

The confusion in the cottage upon this was dread-

ful. Poor Jane was picked up, somehow, and Maria dragged her to the door, where the fresh air presently revived her, while Mrs. Hicks soothed the baby, and the younger ones profited by the occasion to eat all the sugar they could, and besmear themselves with butter ; and in the middle of all this scene Hicks himself came in, having been detained in the hay-field.

Poor Jane was put to bed ; and her father, as he carried her upstairs, noticed for the first time how light and weak she was.

‘I’ll tell you what, mother,’ he said when he came down ; ‘that girl, Jane, is in a bad way ! She’s nothing but a bag of bones ; and I think her shoulder is growing out !’

‘Oh, I don’t think there’s much the matter ; only she’s tired with minding baby all day long. I had to go to wash at Mrs. Maynard’s, and Maria’s been amusing herself in the town, and never thinking of us slaving at home.’

‘Well, all I can say is, Maria must take her turn, now. I won’t have my little Jane knocked up. If you don’t choose to work, Maria, I won’t work for you, and you may get your own living.’

‘And so I will,’ said she, pertly. ‘I have got a place, and I am going to it next week ; so I won’t trouble you much longer !’

Hicks was naturally taken aback at this sudden announcement ; and his wife chimed in : ‘I’m

sure I don't know how I shall manage, with Jane poorly and baby wanting so much nursing ; but you know, father, it's a mouth the less, and it isn't much Maria does, and if she earns a bit, why it'll help.'

'The wages isn't more than will dress me,' said Maria, who had no thought of spending on any one but herself.

'And where is this place?' said Hicks ; a question his wife had never thought of asking, and Maria repeated what she had already told Fanny, not mentioning, however, the 'evenings out,' of which she knew her father would not approve.

The shop was known to be a respectable one, and it really seemed that, if Maria was resolved not to stay at home, she could not do better than take the place ; so as Jane appeared better next morning, no positive opposition was offered by her parents, though her father did say that she shouldn't go if Jane was worse ; and Maria stayed at home all that day, and actually helped in housework, in the intervals of looking over and smartening up her wardrobe.

Meantime, Fanny Prior had no opportunity that evening of asking her mother's consent to her offering for Mrs. Grimes' place, for Mrs. Prior was more ailing than usual, and went to bed directly after tea, and Fanny had enough to do in putting the little ones to bed and providing supper for her

father and brothers when they returned, hungry and tired, from the hay-field.

But though she did not speak about it, she thought of it all the more, and became so afraid that the place would be snapped up if she did not do something about it at once, that next morning she began,—

‘Mother, I want to go to service!’

‘Why, Fanny, that’s a new idea! Whatever has put it into your head?’

‘Maria Hicks has got a place, down to Mrs. Collins’, the grocer, in the town, and she has heard of a place for me, at Mrs. Grimes’, and I should like to offer for it.’

‘Why, what’s taken the girl?’ said poor Mrs. Prior, in great astonishment. ‘Mrs. Grimes! What do you know about Mrs. Grimes?’

‘I don’t know anything, except what Maria told me.’

‘You are much too fond of gossiping with Maria Hicks. I don’t think she’s at all good company for you, so flashy as she is in her dress, and always idling about. She had much better help her mother at home. And as to you, Fanny, you had better drive this nonsense out of your head; so go up and make the beds at once, and then there’s lots of mending to do.’

Then, seeing that Fanny’s eyes had filled with tears, she added, in a gentler voice, ‘I am not

angry with you, my girl. I suppose you may wish for a change ; but just now I am too poorly to spare you, and baby is so teasy with his teeth ; so don't let us say any more about it, but just go and do your work.'

Fanny went about her work, but with a heavy heart. The idea of a place in the town had somehow captivated her imagination ; not that Mrs. Grimes' sounded anything very charming ; but on her one visit to the town for her Confirmation, the gay shops had looked so attractive, that, though she had succeeded in driving them from her thoughts while she knelt in the church, she had often thought of them since, and longed to see them again.

Happily, Maria was too busily employed in sorting her finery to come and look after her friend ; but the following morning she called in, on her way to the town (to buy, as she announced, 'a polonaise and a dress-improver'), to know if anything had been done about Mrs. Grimes' place, and, Mrs. Prior being out of the way, she so dazzled poor Fanny by her accounts of the delights of the town, and pitied her so much for being kept 'mewed up' at home, and 'treated like a slave,' that Fanny really began to consider herself ill-used, and did not object when Maria proposed to tell Mrs. Grimes that she was quite ready to come to her, only that she was bullied by her parents.

Off went Maria, looking so bright and gay. And as Fanny watched her she was foolish enough to admire and to covet her turned-up hat, with its red feather and beaded veil, and her greasy, second-hand plaid silk, and to look down with contempt on her own print, which, though washed out and patched, was still neat and clean, and, by any sensible person, infinitely to be preferred to the other's tawdry finery.

She could think of nothing else but the possibility of Mrs. Grimes' place all the morning, and was still full of it when Maria reappeared with a hard-featured woman, whom she introduced as Mrs. Grimes. And Mrs. Prior, who had entirely forgotten her conversation with her daughter the day before, and could not imagine who the unpleasant-looking stranger could be, stood waiting for an explanation, which Fanny was too much ashamed to give.

However, Mrs. Grimes soon made known her errand.

'I've come about your daughter, mum, for my place, as I heard she would like it; but you couldn't spare her to come to see me, so, as I had an errand this way, I thought I'd call in. She's hardly as big as I should have liked, but I dare say she'll do; and I'm sure you wouldn't wish to stand in your gal's way when she wants to do a bit for herself. Gals will be gals, and we can't expect old heads on

young shoulders ; but you may be sure I'll be a mother to her.'

She would have gone on longer ; but Mrs. Prior, who could not speak before from sheer astonishment, now found breath to interrupt her.

'I don't understand, Mrs. Grimes, since that is your name, what has made you come after my girl, or who could have told you she would like your place ; for she isn't going to service at all at present, and when she does, I shall look out for a place for her myself.'

'You can't deny,' said Mrs. Grimes, angrily, 'that you or the gal sent me a message by Maria there.'

'I did nothing of the sort !' said Mrs. Prior. 'What does it all mean, Fanny ?'

And Fanny, much ashamed, and hardly able to speak for sobbing, had to confess that she had told Maria she would like the place, and that Maria had offered to tell Mrs. Grimes so.

'And you won't let the gal come when she wishes it?' said Mrs. Grimes. 'There's tyranny ! and I wonder she stands it ! No gal of spirit would, I'm sure !'

Mrs. Prior was much annoyed, and no wonder. The unwelcome visitor was dismissed with very little civility, and went off in great wrath. Maria had already slipped away, and Fanny was left to

bear the scolding that the conduct of all three had provoked.

'It is too hard,' said Mrs. Prior, 'that I should be told that I'm a tyrant, and by a perfect stranger; and such a disgraceful-looking woman, too! I can't think, Fanny, how you could bring such a person here to insult your own mother, and how you could wish to go and live with her! You ought to be quite ashamed of yourself; and I don't know what your father will say when he hears of it. The idea of my being talked to like that! I'll tell you what, Fanny, if you go gossiping with Maria Hicks any more, and letting her bring her flashy friends here, I shall never trust you out of my sight; so don't let me hear anything more about her or Mrs. Grimes. I am sure I don't know if I ought to trust you out with baby this afternoon.'

Fanny protested, with many tears, that she would not go near Maria, and carried baby off to a shady lane that bordered a wood of Squire Arden's, and walked up and down till the child went off to sleep, when she sat down on the grassy bank to think and cry over her troubles.

But her tears flowed more from wounded feeling and disappointment, than from penitence at having annoyed her mother, and she was still crying bitterly when the sound of wheels and bells made her look up, and she saw Miss Arden driving by in her pretty pony carriage.

Miss Arden was the Squire's only daughter, who had always taken a great interest in Fanny, having had her in her Sunday-class for some years, and having helped to prepare her for Confirmation, and now, on seeing the girl's distress, she got out of the carriage and came to her.

'Why, Fanny, what is the matter? Has anything happened? I hope your mother isn't ill.'

'No, Miss, it isn't that;' and the young lady's question so brought home to Fanny the selfishness of her grief, that she cried more than ever, and hardly knew how to explain what had happened. At length, however, Miss Arden made out that she wanted to go to service, and that her mother would not let her.

'I don't think that's such a very great trouble,' said Miss Arden, smiling; 'and really, until your mother is stronger, and baby is able to walk, I don't see how you can be spared. But what made you wish to go to service? Have you heard of a place?'

'Yes, Miss,' said Fanny, hanging down her head, for now she had seen Mrs. Grimes, she felt rather ashamed of having wished to enter her service.

'Where is it?—near here?'

'In the town, Miss; at Mrs. Grimes', in West Street.'

'Grimes? I don't remember ever hearing the name before. Does she keep a shop?'

'Yes, Miss; second-hand clothes. Maria said——'

'I remember seeing a very nasty-looking shop for old clothes in West Street; but perhaps it isn't that. But what has Maria got to do with it?'

'Please, Miss, she's got a place at Mrs. Collins', the grocer's, and when she was buying something at Mrs. Grimes', she found she wanted a girl, and she mentioned me; and Mrs. Grimes came just now to mother with Maria, and offered me her place, and mother sent her away: and mother is so angry with me.' And Fanny began to cry again.

'I met Maria just now,' said Miss Arden, 'with a woman who didn't look at all nice or respectable. She wore a green bonnet, and was much marked with the small-pox. Was that Mrs. Grimes?'

'Yes, Miss.'

'And you wished to leave home, and go and live with her? Why, Fanny, I never should have expected it of you! I thought you were such a good daughter at home, and always tried to save your mother trouble and to spare her all you could!'

'Yes, Miss,' said poor Fanny, who felt more and more ashamed; 'but Maria talked so much about being independent, and being in the town, and I did so want to see the shops. And really, Miss, it wasn't only that! I did want to earn something for father and mother!'

'Yes, Fanny, I can quite believe that. But what made you take a fancy to Mrs. Grimes?'

'Oh, indeed, Miss, I didn't! I never saw her

till to-day, and I didn't like her at all. She called mother a tyrant! and poor mother is so hurt and so vexed with me.'

'I don't wonder, for she has always been such a kind mother to you. Just think what care she has taken of you ever since you were born; and when you had that bad fever two or three years ago, how she sat up with you night after night; and I don't think she has ever been as strong since. It seems a poor return for all that, Fanny, to wish to leave her and to run away from your home duties.'

'But if I went to service, Miss, it would be a saving for father!'

'Would it? I am not sure of that. Is your mother fit for all the house work, cleaning, and mending, and cooking, besides minding the children?'

'No, Miss. I don't think she is.'

'Well, then, she would have to hire a girl to do it, and it would be quite a chance if she could get a girl whom she could trust as she does you—one who would know all her ways and your father's, and get the meals ready, and take proper care of the baby. Then a girl would eat as much as you do, and have to be paid besides; so there would be no saving there. You know, Fanny, if a girl is wanted at home, that is her proper place, and she had better stay there and perform the duties that God has appointed for her, instead of looking out for others elsewhere. And, indeed, my feeling is, if a

girl won't do her duty by her parents, she is not likely to do it by her employer.'

'Then wouldn't you wish me to go out, Miss?'

'Yes, indeed I should, when your mother can spare you, and then I shall be ready to help you to a better place than Mrs. Grimes'; but you must wait till that time comes, and meantime remember, Fanny, that you are fitting yourself for service by practising obedience, and self-denial, and patience, all of which will be wanted if you go into a nursery.'

'Yes, Miss, I will try to be patient; and indeed, Miss, I am very sorry that I vexed mother so: but I never expected Mrs. Grimes would have come, only I was afraid of losing the place.'

'I don't think you will mind missing it now, for though it isn't always fair to judge people by their looks, I should be very sorry for you to go into Mrs. Grimes' service. Did Maria tell you anything about her?'

'Yes, Miss;' and Fanny told about the bonnet and the woman's bargain with Maria.

'Well, that doesn't give me quite a comfortable impression of her; and I should very much doubt whether, in a place like that, you would have any chance of attending church.'

'No, Miss, I dare say not. I wish I had never heard of Mrs. Grimes, but I did so much want to go out to service. Maria seemed so independent-like, going off to the town for the whole day, and

nothing to do but to amuse herself, while I never can get away.'

'I dare say that is a little trying, but still I think you have a more comfortable home than Maria. Your mother is a different sort of woman from Mrs. Hicks. And then, too, though I don't stand up for Maria, for I think she is too apt to neglect her home duties, there is Jane to take her place, and I think she gets on with the little ones better than Maria does.'

'Yes, Miss, but it is so hard on Jane. On Monday, when Maria was all day in town, she had to nurse the baby a great deal, and she told me she felt quite sick, with such a pain in her back, and that evening she fainted right away after Maria came back.'

'Poor girl ! I am very sorry to hear it. I will go to ask after her. You may be thankful for your good health, Fanny ; it is a great gift from God. And now I will just go to your mother and tell her how sorry you are, and remember you ask her to forgive you when you go home ; and then I must ask after Jane. Good-bye, Fanny, and don't forget to pray to God to forgive you your discontent, and to help you, as the Catechism says, to do your duty in that state of life unto which it has pleased Him to call you.'

'Thank you, Miss, so much !'

And Fanny walked up and down with her baby,

feeling much happier than she had done, till it was time to take him home, when her mother received her very kindly, and readily forgave her; and her mind had been so cleared by Miss Arden's words from the cobwebs of discontent with which Marja had filled it, that she found herself wondering at her own folly.

Having thus cheered and guided Fanny in the right way, Miss Arden re-entered her carriage, and, after speaking to Mrs. Prior, drove to Mrs. Hicks' door, where she found poor Jane in charge of the baby—her mother having gone out charing; and Maria having thought it necessary to set Mrs. Grimes on her way back to the town, to put her in good humour after her reception by Mrs. Prior.

The other little ones were in the hay-field with their father; but Jane looked nearly worn-out, as it was, with the fractiousness of the baby, and owned, in answer to Miss Arden's questions, that her back and side hurt her very much.

A sudden thought struck Miss Arden.

'I will take you and baby for a drive. I dare say the air will quiet her, and I have got a parasol in the carriage to shade her.'

Poor Jane looked delighted at the idea, and the young lady, telling her to get herself and the baby tidy, and to be ready in half-an-hour, drove off to the hay-field where Jane's father was at work, and sent for him to speak to her.

‘I am not at all satisfied about Jane,’ she began. ‘I have just been seeing her, and she looks so pale and ill, and complains of pain in the back, and I fancy that her left shoulder is growing out.’

‘Yes, Miss ; that is just what I said to my missus two nights ago, when Jane fainted and I had to carry her upstairs. She looks uncommon bad.’

‘Indeed she does ; and I came now to tell you that I am going to take her and the baby a drive, and to ask if you have any objection to my taking her to Dr. Row, just to see if there is any mischief?’

‘Thank you, Miss. I don’t know any objection, for I’m not easy about the maid.’

‘Very well, then. I’ll take her at once.’

And away went Miss Arden, leaving Hicks rather bewildered by the suddenness of the idea.

Miss Arden found Jane and the baby both arrayed in their best, and when they were seated by her, and were driving through the village, the ponies trotting briskly to the sound of their bells, the baby was happy, being well amused, while to poor Jane the rest and easy motion, not to speak of the astonished looks of the neighbours when they recognised her, made up such an amount of pleasure as she had never known before.

When they arrived at Dr. Row’s, his wife kindly undertook the baby, while the doctor, after a talk with Miss Arden, examined Jane’s spine carefully,

and communicated his opinion privately to the young lady, while good-natured Mrs. Row gave the poor girl a cup of tea, and feasted the infant too.

'I am very glad you have shown her to me,' said the doctor, 'before there was any irremediable mischief done. As you thought, the left shoulder has grown out, and there is a slight curvature of the spine. The girl has outgrown her strength, and has been overworked, especially in carrying that heavy child, and has probably always nursed it on her left arm. If something is done at once she can be saved; but if she goes on as she is doing now she will be crippled for life, though I don't suppose she would live long under such circumstances. What she requires is complete rest, with lying down and careful nursing; but how she is to get that at home I don't see.'

'Can nothing be done in the way of strengthening her?'

'Yes, she can have tonics and broths, and I will bandage her shoulder, which will be some support; but those will be merely palliatives, and as long as she lugs that great child about she has no chance.'

'I am sure the Convalescent Home at L—— would be the place for her. Wouldn't it? I know the lady-superintendent, and I would readily pay for her.'

'The very place, I should think.'

'Then I will take her home as soon as you have

bandaged her, and speak to her mother, so as to lose no time.'

As has been already shown, Miss Arden always did at once what she undertook; so she drove Jane home to her mother, who received her with astonishment and delight, and, sending the girl upstairs, explained her plan to Mrs. Hicks.

Of course she could not make her understand at once; but, by dint of repeating the doctor's opinion, and enforcing upon her how terrible it would be if Jane became a cripple, and a tax upon her parents, instead of a support to them in their old age, and promising to pay all expenses, she succeeded in obtaining her consent to Jane's becoming an inmate of the Convalescent Home; and then, after a few words to Jane about the charms of the Home, hurried home to send off a letter, by that day's post, to the Lady Superintendent, so that the girl should go there as early as possible in the following week.

It may be imagined how great was Hicks' astonishment when, on his return home, he heard of all that had been done that afternoon.

'Well, I *am* glad!' he exclaimed, 'for I didn't feel happy about my little maid; and it is kind of Miss Arden.'

Poor Jane's face beamed with delight, while Maria looked proportionately sulky; for she had seen her sister in the pretty carriage, and had envied

her pleasure, and now her temper was not improved by her mother's announcing,—

‘Of course, Maria, as Miss Arden said, you will give up your place now, as you can't be spared; but she said you shouldn't be a sufferer by losing it, as she would find you one later.’

‘I'm not going to be sacrificed to Jane's nonsense and give up my place!’ said Maria, sulkily. ‘Miss Arden had better mind her own affairs, and coddle her favourite Jane!’

‘Well, Maria, you needn't go and grudge your own sister a bit of pleasure. It isn't much that she gets, poor little maid!’

Poor Jane roused herself from charming visions of the rest that she was about to enjoy, her chief idea of happiness just then, to try and soothe her sister's irritation.

‘Maria, dear, I'll not stay longer away than I can help. I'll come home as soon as I can, if you'll try and just help mother for a bit; and I am sure Miss Arden will get you a nice place.’

But Maria was too angry to be soothed, and after snubbing her sister sharply, and abusing Miss Arden, told her parents that she certainly ‘should not disappoint Mrs. Collins.’

‘I'll see about that,’ said her father, who was seriously provoked by her ill-humour and selfishness. ‘I only gave you leave if Jane was well; so I shall go straight to town and see Mrs. Collins.’

And off he went at once on his long walk, and Jane retreated to bed, to enjoy her anticipations in peace.

It was late when Hicks returned ; but his wife and Maria were still up, and he handed the latter a note from Mrs. Collins, saying that she released her from her engagement, and knew of another girl to suit her, but that she would be quite ready to help her whenever she was again able to go to service.

Maria's passion upon this burst all bounds. She had fully expected that Mrs. Collins would refuse to give her up, and now, in her rage and disappointment, she heaped abuse upon her father, accused him of taking the bread out of her mouth, and finally flounced off to bed, leaving her parents startled and dismayed, and not knowing what to do next.

Matters were not improved next morning, though Jane, encouraged by the prospect before her, and unconscious of the scene of the night before, felt brighter and better than she had done for some time ; but Maria remained silent and sulky till both parents had gone to their work, when she suddenly appeared before her sister with a bundle, and announcing, 'I'm off to Mrs. Grimes ! I won't stay here to be bullied !' started for the town, and when her father pursued her there that evening, he found her installed in the old clothes shop, and so

obstinate in her refusal to return that he gave it up as a bad job, and persuaded his wife, with some difficulty, to undertake the home duties, so that Miss Arden was able to send Jane to the Home on the appointed day. There, what with complete rest, charming air, and kind treatment and instruction, the poor girl improved rapidly, both body and mind benefiting by the change; and when at length she returned home, well and strong, she found her mother so much interested in her home duties that there was no danger of the daughter's strength being again overtaken.

A year had passed since Miss Arden's talk in the lane with Fanny Prior, and its good fruits had been visible ever since in the girl's attention to her duties, and her zealous performance of them. She had received a warning, too, for the selfish and self-willed Maria had left Mrs. Grimes' service in sad disgrace, having been convicted of dishonesty, and had gone no one knew whither.

One bright morning Miss Arden sent for Fanny Prior to come up to the 'Great House,' as the people called Ferncote Park, and told her that she knew that her mother could spare her now, so she had got a place for her.

'My sister-in-law,' she said, 'has got another baby, and so she wants a nursery-maid, and my brother says I must send them a Ferncote girl; so

I have thought of you, and your mother gives her consent.'

Fanny's delight may be imagined; and Miss Arden added, 'I have watched you all this time, and I have seen you so careful of your baby-brother, and your mother has given so good an account of you, that I am sure you could be trusted with my little nephew when the nurse is busy with the baby. You will have six pounds a-year to begin with, and you will be wanted in a fortnight. It is in London, near the Park, and near some shops, too; so don't you think it is better than Mrs. Grimes'?'

It need only be added, that Fanny fully justified Miss Arden's recommendation and gave great satisfaction to her new mistress; and some years after, when the young lady married and had a nursery of her own, Fanny came into her service, and finally became head-nurse.

Of Maria we can say no more; but what good could we expect to hear of one who turned from her natural duties, who was undutiful to her parents, and who would rather have seen her sister crippled for life than sacrifice her own selfish desire for independence, whose only thought was for her own pleasure and gratification, who only cared for this world and its vanities, and who lived, as it were, without God!

LISO'S STEPMOTHER.

By the Author of 'MADEMOISELLE MORI,'
&c.

'Liso!'

No answer.

'Liso!' This time the voice took a tone of authority, and a girl of some twelve years old turned slowly round in the doorway where she had been leaning, looking idly out on the street, if such a term can be used in speaking of an Esthonian village, which is more like a handful of huts, dropped by chance here and there, than any place constructed by civilised people. Each cottage stood within a desolate enclosure, surrounded by a ruinous hedge. Except round the one where Liso lived there was no attempt at a garden, but here and there stood a tall pine or a birch-tree, spared when a clearing was made in the great forest amid which this hamlet stood. Every door was open; there was a general

murmur of voices, mingled with the cries of the various animals which seemed to go in and out as they pleased : bare-legged children, clothed in a scanty shirt, were rolling among the lambs, goats, pigs, and fowls ; sometimes a woman, stout and dirty, would come out and cuff them, and then go in again grumbling. All round rose the dark forest, covering many miles of marshy ground, where bears and wolves had their dens.

The voice which had already twice summoned Liso called her again ; evidently some further answer was required than the sulky movement which the girl had condescended to give.

‘ Well ! ’ she muttered at length, in a tone corresponding with the gloomy and defiant face which she turned to the speaker.

‘ You must take your father’s dinner, Liso ; he is overlooking the wood-cutters at Berstens. Make haste ; I want him to have it while it is hot.’

The words were spoken with a foreign accent, and the speaker looked like a German. While Liso, and the little brother who was labouring over a copy-book at a table, had the fair hair, extraordinarily long and thick, which belongs to the Esthonnians, blue eyes and pale complexions, the young woman who had addressed her was fair and rosy, with nut-brown hair, and a figure so tall and slim that it was clear she could not belong to the thick-women of this country. Yes, Fransiska was a

foreigner, and was made to feel herself so hourly in this wild spot, on the shores of the grey Baltic, so far from the German parsonage where she had lived all her childhood. She was a foreigner, therefore an enemy—doubly an enemy; the Esthonians suspect and dislike whatever is new to them, but they absolutely detest whatever is German: for the Germans once conquered their land, and were cruel masters, and the haughty Esthonians do not accept bondage with the meekness of their neighbours, the Letts.

The father of Liso, Daniela, was the chief man in the village, the steward of the German lord to whom all the land near belonged, but who lived far away, and came so seldom, that Daniela was the real ruler of the estate. It was a great proof of his worth that nevertheless he was a general favourite, although every one had been displeased by his marriage with the daughter of the German minister, whom he had met when absent on a journey to consult his master about some improvements on the property. He was away some months; when he came back he brought a waggon-load of furniture, such as no one had seen before in the village; tools equally strange and suspicious; and a young wife, the least welcome of all. Daniela was a widower. He had lost his wife five years before, at the birth of little Inrik, the child who was so diligently

copying the words written for him by his stepmother, while his sister dawdled at the door.

Liso had imbibed all the village prejudices against Fransiska. She had never forgotten or forgiven the look of dismay which came on the young wife's face as she entered her new home. Poor as her own had been, it was clean, neat, and cheerful; while, though Daniela was rich, compared to her father and the villagers, his house was exactly like theirs, with walls of rough fir-logs, the spaces between stuffed with moss; the floor earthen, the furniture rude enough for a Red Indian wigwam; and the people who crowded to stare at the stranger seemed to her almost savages. Daniela saw it all suddenly as if through her eyes, and murmured in German, 'Forgive me, Fransiska; I did not know how it would all look to you!'

Fransiska saw his great blue eyes full of tears. This man, with his long wild hair, mingling with a huge beard, his broad shoulders and blunt ways, was really as gentle and tender as a child. She knew it well, and, vexed to have grieved him, lifted up and kissed the little Inrik, who was gazing at her as he might have done at a queen. 'You will see what a difference our furniture will make; and here is something better than any grand house,' she said, pressing his cheek to hers. Daniela's honest face lighted up directly; he spoke heartily to his

friends, laughing for sheer happiness, but Liso scowled all the more. She could not understand the German words, but she saw clearly that her stepmother did not admire the house of which she was so proud ; for had it not two rooms, whereas most there had but one ? What was the use of having done her best to clean it, with the help of a neighbour, who had advised her all the time not to let the German woman tyrannize over her ? What was the good of having turned out the fowls, the lambs, the sheep and dogs, whose ill-used and wondering cries she could hear that moment ? To what purpose had she lighted such a large fire in the middle of the room, that the smoke filled the whole house, if this was all that came of it ? She had expected that the new-comer would be astonished, humbled, by all she saw, and the disappointment was keen. Finally, and perhaps this was, after all, the true reason of her resentment, Fransiska had kissed Inrik, and never looked at her ! Liso forgot that she had hidden herself as much out of sight as possible, and that perhaps her stepmother hardly yet knew which of all the yellow-haired girls flocking together to look at her and titter audibly was her new daughter.

Since then, how many reasons Liso had found for fresh anger ! how often the villagers had seen cause to shake their heads, and explain Daniela's affection for her by her having bewitched him !

The furniture which had come from Germany was placed in the house, and Daniela added another room, so that, counting the bath-room, which even the poorest Esthonian's hut always possesses, there were now four. Liso sneered at such luxury, but she was secretly very proud of it. There were cupboards, a mirror, a sofa—all things unknown in the village; a clock, which every one came to see, and long believed to be alive. The neighbour who had given Liso such good advice was extremely afraid of it, and when she discovered that this surprising creature had lived for a whole week without eating, she went to all her friends to tell the amazing tale, explaining it by hinting that 'the German woman' must be a witch—an accusation really dangerous in this wild and superstitious land, and readily accepted by her hearers. They went to church, indeed, and had a little teaching in a small school; but many of them still believed in the old heathen gods whom their forefathers had prayed to—Perkuno, the thunder god; Laima, goddess of fate; and many others—in a half-ashamed way, and used spells and charms, and believed in witches and the evil eye. Another change which surprised every one was that Daniela sat a large stove in each room with a chimney, so that no more smoke hung about; and used candlesticks instead of sticking torches of birchwood into some chinks in the walls; and instead of stopping up the holes which served as

windows with a plank at night, he filled them with glass. Though the outside of the house still looked like any other, within it had become as neat and cheerful as any German's. Every one came to see it, and every one went away blaming these alterations. They thought Fransiska very proud, and, above all, blamed her for having altogether banished the 'poor dumb beasts;' and this, indeed, went peculiarly to Liso's heart.

'Drive out the hens! Forbid the pigs to come rubbing themselves against the stove! How could any one expect them to thrive?'

But here she found herself obliged to yield to the gentle but firm will of Fransiska. How many struggles the young stepmother had had with this ungracious girl, whom she would so gladly have taken to her heart as she had done little Inrik! How earnestly she had prayed to be enabled to take a mother's place with the children of the husband whom she loved so dearly, that she could have been very happy in her strange new life among this half-barbarous people, and never have regretted her old home, if only Liso would have loved her half as much as Inrik did!

From the moment he saw her the little fellow had, as it were, given himself to the stepmother, who, to him, seemed the sweetest, kindest, tenderest of human beings.

The child had never known a woman's caressing

love until now. He had missed it without knowing what was wanting to him. Cousin Leno, their next neighbour, had looked after the house till Fransiska came; but she was loud-voiced and rough-handed, and had no time to pet him, and Liso never thought to do so.

She saw Fransiska's sweet, motherly ways with the boy at first with blank wonder, then with scorn, and the more he clung to her the more Liso seemed to hold aloof. Often and often Fransiska asked herself why Liso disliked her—why every word which she addressed to her seemed to affront the girl, and how she could win and guide her. Liso's eyes seemed always watching her with a mocking or angry look. If she tried to check her the girl seemed deaf, or laughed insolently at the mistakes which 'the German woman' made in speaking the musical and stately Esthonian tongue, which Daniela thought so sweet on her lips. As for learning to read, sew, write, or count, she absolutely refused to try; while Inrik made rapid progress, learning readily, as all Esthonians can when not hindered by their natural laziness. Fransiska lost patience sometimes, and knew that she had given Liso an advantage over her by her hastiness; but if she had been really unkind, as Liso declared, she need only let Daniela find out how his daughter behaved. But she never complained of her, and made his home as cheerful as she had seen her mother make

the little parsonage in Germany while the minister still lived.

Daniela had never been given to drink, like almost all the villagers. Brandy did not tempt him or he would not have been the upright, trustworthy man he was, in whom his employers could place entire confidence ; but during his widowhood, perhaps before, he had been a grave, melancholy man, silent, and seldom smiling. He saw everything going wrong in his household without knowing how to alter it, and wished his children to be better trained and taught than those of his neighbours, for he had travelled, and did not think Esthonia perfect, but could not think how to bring it about. Now his kind face seemed beaming with content. He came home to a well-ordered home, and found a wife who could share his interests, give good counsel, and was always gladly expecting his return. Daniela looked as happy as his little Inrik. It was clear that 'the foreign woman' had bewitched both father and son.

'But not me,' Liso would say to herself.

And to prove it she opposed every order that Fransiska gave her, even if it were something which she would gladly have done had any one else asked her. She would have liked to take her father's dinner, stay with him, and watch the wood-cutters ; but Fransiska had proposed it, so of course she must refuse.

'Cannot Inrik go?' she muttered.

'No; it is much too far. I do not like his going alone through the forest. The lord of the wood' (wolf) 'might eat my boy. It would be afraid of a great girl like you, Liso.'

Fransiska's pleasant smile did not soften the perverse girl.

'What stuff!' she muttered. 'He went often enough into the forest before you came.'

'Let me go, mother,' said Inrik, raising his fair head from his copy-book with an indignant look at his sister. 'I am ready, if she is not!'

'No, my darling; you are too little. You will stay with mother. Liso, you heard what I said?'

'Father told you last night you were spoiling Inrik, and that he would not have it,' answered Liso, without stirring.

It was true; but it sounded very different said by the father, as he laughed and kissed wife and son, to what it did when Liso repeated his words.

Fransiska coloured hotly. She was going to speak; but, luckily for Liso, she had learned to command a temper naturally quick. She was silent; but it was a little satisfaction to have made her eyes flash so. Liso was pleased, but rather frightened too. She wondered what her step-mother would do next.

'I'll go, mother dear!' cried Inrik, springing on her lap, and hugging her. 'I'll go so fast—so fast!

and when I come back you will tell me fairy tales, and what you did when you were little, and played at "Lady mother, lend me your scissors!"

Fransiska pressed him close to her, and the love of this child was doubly sweet because Liso would give her none. She put him down to pack up Daniela's dinner, and a few sharp words passed between brother and sister.

'If I were you I would not be like a flattering, cowardly Lett!' Liso muttered. 'Nonsense about her loving you! Love, indeed! It will last just as long as a sausage in a dog's mouth!'

'Girls have much hair and little wit!' retorted the child, indignantly. 'Since mother came we have been as well off as the Czar, who has pork and bacon to eat every day!'

'Here, my boy,' said Fransiska, returning; 'carry it carefully, and keep to the path. The sun does not shine to-day,' she added, looking out.

'No, mother; do you know why? There is a poor orphan behind the hills, and he is gone to dry her tears! . . . She has no mother like you! Good-bye, little mammy.'

And he went off, singing a ballad much loved by the village children, which began—

'O little lark, my little lark, what dost thou by the water?'

'O I shall marry in the spring the water-wagtail's daughter.'

Fransiska stood looking fondly after him till he

disappeared in the forest, then she sat down and began working scarlet flowers on a black frock for Liso. The village costume was black, woven at home, of a stuff called 'wadmal,' but it was enlivened by red trimmings and embroidery, and a sort of silver breastplate hung with bells, and rings, and coins. Men and women wore this black wadmal in coats, gloves, stockings, dresses, and warm pelisses. Liso stood sulking in the door, expecting a scolding; but none came. Fransiska had tried remonstrance, affection, arguments, until she was heartsick. She had no more to say, and though at first she was wondering how it would be right to treat the wayward girl, her thoughts strayed away, and presently Liso was surprised and ill-used to see a pensive smile steal over her face, as if she and her behaviour had quite gone out of Fransiska's head. They had. She was thinking of Germany and her childhood; her dear dead father, and her widowed mother, now living with a married son. Liso wondered what was in her mind. It never occurred to her that Fransiska had anything to long for or regret, for to her Esthonia was a paradise, and every one who lived elsewhere greatly to be pitied: but though she never seemed to listen when Inrik was eagerly questioning his stepmother, she always gathered up with curiosity anything that she could learn about Fransiska's old life, and

was often touched and interested, in spite of herself.

The striking of the clock warned Fransiska that dinner-time had come; she rose to set the table, but paused as her next neighbour, Cousin Leno, came hastily in, pushing Liso roughly aside.

'My Janis is ill!' she cried, alarm overcoming her aversion to 'the German.' 'You cured Inrik with some charm . . . will you come and help me? I have tried all I know.'

Fransiska followed her into the dirty hut, saying to Liso, 'You must get dinner for yourself, my dear; and if Inrik does not come, go and meet him.'

Liso wondered within herself if she knew half the ill that Leno had said of her, and whether she would have gone were it so. Fransiska knew very well; but she could not weigh that when a child's life was in danger. She found the boy so ill that she could only come back once to bid Liso go and meet Inrik at once, and hasten away again.

Inrik, meanwhile, had gone steadily past the tempting wood-strawberries, which lay thickly on the ground, and carried the dinner safely to Daniela, sharing it, and delighted to watch the falling trees; but on his way home the coral berries were too tempting, he must gather some for his mother—the finest—and all which were not fine

enough went into his own mouth. From plant to plant led him a long way, so long that he at last perceived he had reached a part of the wood quite unknown to him, with thicket and tall trees all round, and no sign of a path, and every step led him deeper in. Frightened and tired, he sat down and began to cry, face downwards on the moss, and somehow the tears ceased, and little Inrik was asleep. When he awoke it was almost dark, and he could not think where he was, but as recollection came, the sense of terror and loneliness came too, and he called piteously, with all his might, 'Mother! mother!'

• Fransiska, far away, could not hear, could not answer, that frightened call: but if she did not, something else did; there was a rustling in the branches, and two glowing eyes were fixed on the boy! He sprang up in wild alarm, only to be struck down by the wolf's paw, and then he felt himself seized by his little frock, and dragged over the stones, through the thickets, half lifted, half pulled, helpless, speechless, and dropped at last into her lair, among three young cubs, which licked him and rolled him over, and growled for joy, while the she-wolf stood over them, as if waiting for her prey to try to escape before she seized it by the throat. But the child lay as if dead.

Daniela came home rather late, and was sur-

prised not to see his wife at his door, looking out for him. Liso, coming back from a romp with some of her friends, explained her absence, and Daniela asked for Inrik. She stared at him, and then turning very white, rushed into Leno's cottage, regardless of Fransiska's warning sign that the sick boy slept, exclaiming, 'Father's home, and he does not know where Inrik is !'

'Liso ! did you not go to meet him ?' But, without waiting for an answer, she ran out to Daniela.

'The boy is lost in the forest !' he said, looking as pale as Liso, before a dozen words were said. 'My little lad ! I did think you would take care of the child, Fransiska !'

And he hurried off to call neighbours to search the forest, forgetful, in his keen anxiety, how unjust the reproach was, how cruel the alarm of his wife. A large party set off very soon with guns and torches ; for a time their calls and shouts were heard, then all was silent. Fransiska sat at home, her hands clasped hard together, hardly able, in that great suspense, to shape a prayer. Leno stood by, talking, lamenting. 'As long as I had the poor motherless lad !' she said, shaking her head. Fransiska made no answer ; but she was startled by Liso's breaking in, 'As long as only you had us we were dirty, and ragged, and hungry, Cousin Leno ;

so there! And she told me to go, only I would not, nor fetch him either; she could not help that, I suppose?' And suddenly throwing herself on her knees by Fransiska she broke into stormy sobs.

Leno went home shrugging her shoulders, and saying that the German woman had bewitched Liso as well as the others; and when she was gone Fransiska succeeded in hushing the wild weeping with tender tones and caresses; but Liso's first words were not what she expected.

'He is angry with you; and it is all my fault!' she sobbed.

'Who?' asked Fransiska, surprised. 'Your father? Dear child, he was only very anxious and unhappy. One must never let what a man says at such times weigh too much. Poor father!'

Liso knew that unjust blame would have made her sullen for days. Fransiska's look and tone gave her a glimpse of blessed love and trust which was a revelation to her.

'I don't know why I have been such a bad girl,' she said, in an odd, grumpy way; but the words did her good. All this while she had craved, half consciously, for her stepmother's love: it seemed strange that now, of all times, she should feel sure she had it; strange, too, to Fransiska, that this stubborn heart should suddenly, as it seemed to her, have yielded; but she could not help asking.

herself, in anguish, was she to buy the girl's love by the loss of her little Inrik? And she listened, in an agony of suspense which communicated itself to Liso, for any sound from the forest.

The searching party looked long in vain,—would, indeed, in that great forest, have never come on the track but for the dogs which guided them. Daniela insisted on following them, though they pushed through such thickets that his neighbours declared the child could not possibly have passed that way. At last they came out on the edge of a great marsh,—boggy ground, dark and treacherous water, gleaming cold in the star-light. The dogs sprang forward with a growl. A wolf rushed out to meet them. There was a fierce struggle, ended by some one knocking her on the head with an axe.

'The dogs were only tracking her,' he said, disappointed, while the poor father thought perhaps they had followed both wolf and child.

'Tis a she-wolf,' said another, holding his torch up; 'run, dogs, find the young ones! Seek! See, there's the nest!' They splashed over the wet ground, and held up the lights.

'Ah, dear Lord!' Daniela cried, seeing what no one else saw, something among the brown, moving things which was no wolf-cub. And he snatched up the child with a cry.

‘The boy is dead!’ murmured the others, gathering round, while the father looked down heart-broken on the white little face, the scratched, bruised limbs, which lay cold in his breast. Just then the blue eyes slowly opened, and a quiver passed over the boy’s frame. He was alive. And so they carried him home, still stupefied, hardly knowing whether he was hurt or not, but certainly alive, in the grey morning, to Daniela’s house. He sent his voice before him, shouting, ‘Found, mother! Here is the boy!’ And Fransiska met them half-way down the village, and took him from his father speechless with gladness. Her touch seemed first really to revive the child. Unclosing one little hand, he said, in a dazed, sleepy way, ‘There are your strawberries, mother,’ and then was quite roused up by her streaming tears. In all that night of terror he had unconsciously held fast the berries which he had picked for her. Daniela was thanking his neighbours, and asking them home to supper, or rather breakfast. General gladness had taken the place of anguish and terror. Fransiska’s heart was full of tremulous thanksgiving; and Liso—Liso was looking at her with dumb gratitude, for, in all the joy of recovering her boy, Fransiska had turned to her, and whispered,—

‘See, Liso, how good the dear God is! I have both my children now!’

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